# rchitecture VEGAS



PREMIERE ISSUE

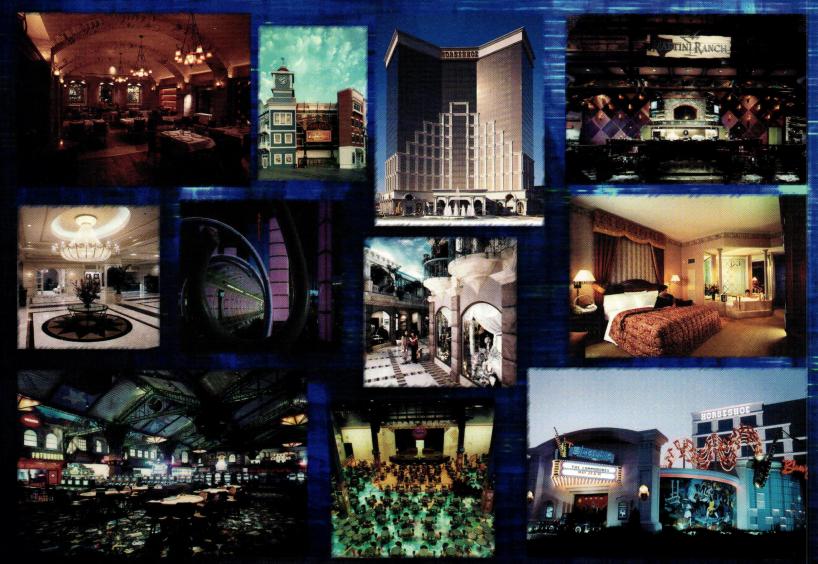
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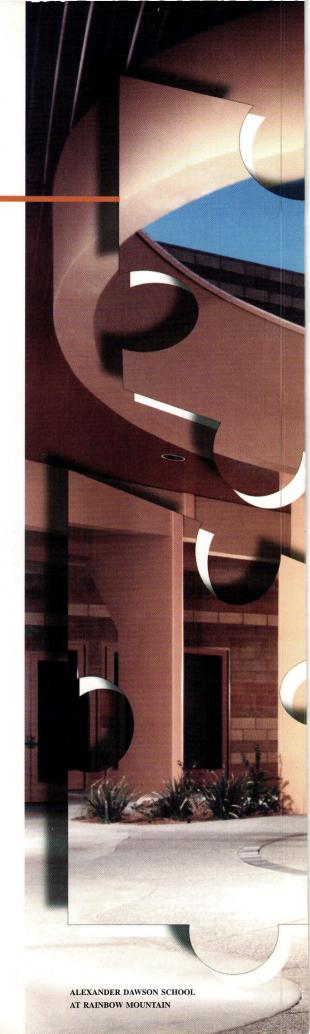
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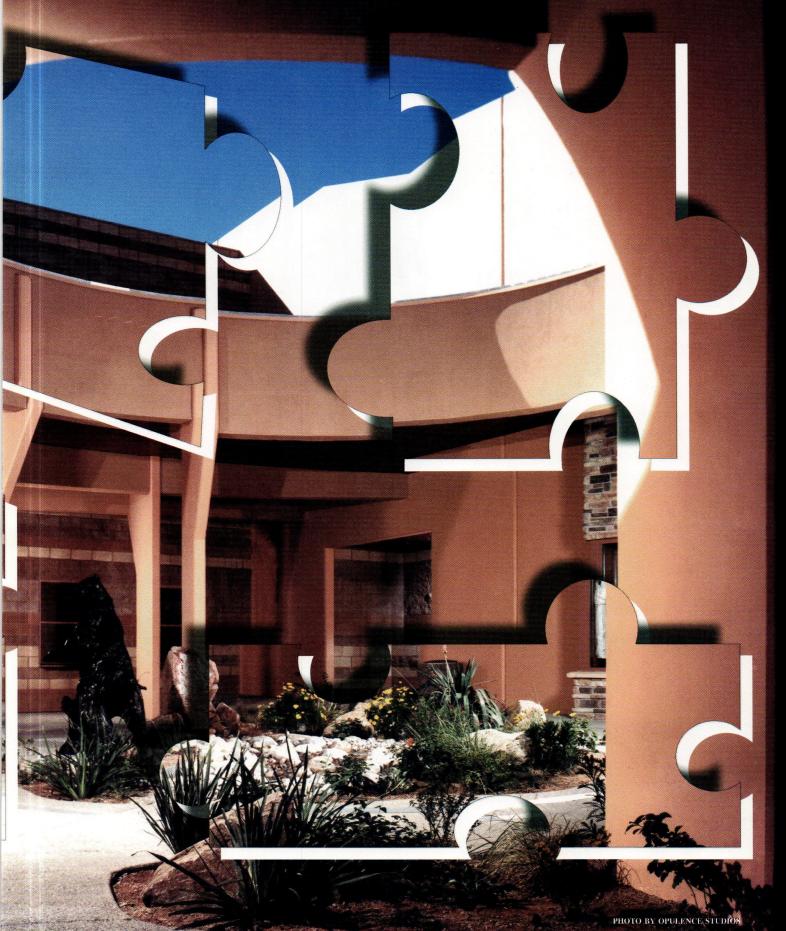
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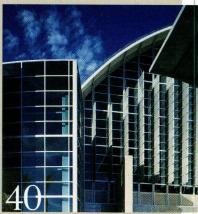
Five great minds and one great purpose: Figure out what exactly we've made here, in this city we call Las Vegas.



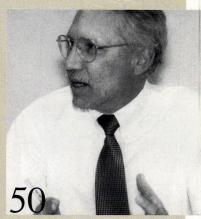
#### ON THE COVER-

Downtown's Federal Courthouse, photographed by Michael Plyler



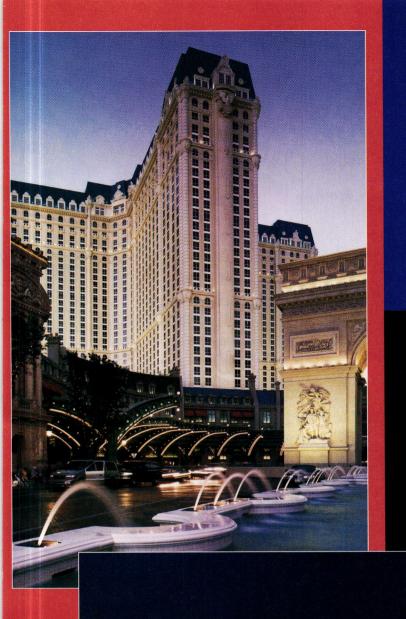






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## president's NOTE

# Let the Dialogue Begin ...

FOR MANY YEARS THE LAS VEGAS CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN Institute of Architects has endeavored to find an avenue into the print media that would allow our members, designers, community leaders and citizens to voice ideas and opinions on the contemporary issues facing Las Vegas. We were seeking an arena where all ideas and opinions could be expressed and exchanged in a healthy dialogue. We feel so fortunate to have established a



partnership with the Greenspun Media Group and Las Vegas Life magazine. With the publication of Architecture Las Vegas, this dialogue can finally begin.

Expressed here are not the ideas of one person or one organization, but the opinions, observations and ideas of respected professionals, critics and writers. No, we are not saying, "Look at us, everything is wonderful." We are offering to exchange ideas, and inviting you to take part. Growth, theming, suburban life, the value of awards programs and campus design are our initial issues. We hope there will be differing opinions and ideas.

Over the years, AIA Las Vegas has provided numerous opportunities for professional advancement, but the discussion of how architecture is shaping this valley has largely been left to the coverage of hotel-casino openings. Each resort that opens creates a place to go—a fantasy of what might be, or what is, in some foreign land. But what about this place we call home? What about the sense of tradition for this valley, or our sense of place? What inherent qualities are there in this desert, in its earliest inhabitants, its geological formations, that could be used to shape the fabric of our communities? Should we be using other cities as models, or should we begin to create hybrids of form based on the unique time and place in which we live? Las Vegas is an international city. We are looked at, visited, critiqued and explored by people from all over the world. Can this be for reasons other than theming or gaming?

We are building at an alarming pace. (A new school opens every 30 days!) But we need to ask, "What are we building?" And at what future cost are we building these structures? Are our buildings obsolete as soon as they open? Are they incorporating the latest technological advances, the newest environmental and spatial research? Are we building neighborhoods that respect and reflect their uniqueness, or cookie-cutter models we pass without a second thought? And does it really matter? These are the types of discussions that can facilitate the shaping of our communities.

Over the next year, AIA Las Vegas will present opportunities for further discussions through lectures, meetings and seminars. It is not only in our best interest to become involved, but it is our responsibility as a profession to inform and involve the community. We must begin to include community members, local professionals and the architecture program at UNLV. Las Vegas is facing many issues in which architects should be providing information and guidance: the options available for housing, homelessness, neighborhood gaming, Downtown reinvention and the wiring of structures for today's communications systems.

We are at a point in the development of this valley where we can begin to put aside past differences and focus on a better tomorrow for all. Projects are in progress right now that will have tremendous impact on the development of our community. In order to have a lasting impact on the shaping of this valley, let us use *Architecture Las Vegas* for its best purpose—the beginnings of a dialogue.

Eric Strain, president, AIA Las Vegas

# Architecture

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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Architecture Las Vegas is published annually, each January, by Las Vegas Life, L.L.C. and the Greenspun Media Group. Newsstand copies of Architecture Las Vegas are available throughout the United States at all major bookstore chains at the single copy price of \$4.95. Copies may be ordered by phone for \$4.95 plus shipping and handling (Nevada residents add 7.25 percent sales tax). Orders outside the United States in U.S. dollars only. Call the Circulation Department at (702) 990-2521.

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Published in association with the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.









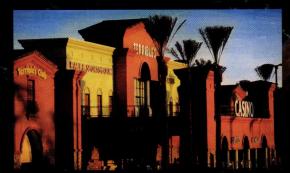


# AWARD WINNING DESIGN

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Potawatomi Bingo Casino, Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Terrible's Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada



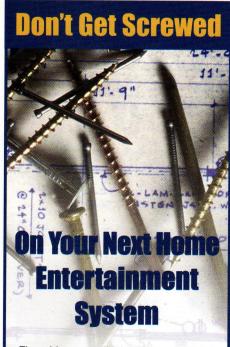
New Palace Casino and Hotel, Biloxi, Mississippi

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#### a letter FROM THE MAYOR



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#### A Cow Town Comes of Age

AS SOMEONE WHO APPRECIATES OUTSTANDING ARCHITECTURE, I am very happy to congratulate you on the launch of your bold new magazine.

As little as five years ago, ventures such as yours would have been unthinkable. Who would have thought that Las Vegas had a population capable of sustaining a magazine about architecture? Good booze and gambling, yes. But architecture?



Students of architecture may recall Leon Krier, reacting to an earlier analysis that praised the architecture of the Strip, thundering, "There is nothing to be learned from Las Vegas except that it constitutes a widespread operation of trivialization."

I do not know that Mr. Krier would react any differently today, but he would almost certainly have to admit that we are a different city, replete with our own store of architectural gems—and more yet to be mined. We are not the cow town we once were. We have a population that yearns to have its aesthetic and cultural needs met. In many ways, architecture reflects a community's cultural standards and sense of identity. We deserve to be surrounded by beautiful buildings. We are not content to settle for mediocrity.

Many of you may understand that my dream for this Valley focuses on reinvigorating Downtown Las Vegas. It is where the city began. It is where the railroad subdivided the town and auctioned off lots in 1905, creating a community out of the desert sand. It is there that I stake my own legacy because I feel Downtown needs to be something so much more special.

Downtown's skyline is changing for the better. The nation's most beautiful federal courthouse—and I have seen many courthouses in my 36 years as a criminal defense attorney—opened in September on Las Vegas Boulevard. I invite everyone to take an up-close look at this imposing \$97 million structure (pictured on the cover of this magazine) with its huge metallic canopy and 200-ton steel stalk.

Stretching west from there along Lewis Avenue, several other buildings are going up—including the first Class A office tower built downtown in a quarter century.

My friends over at the Clark County Government Center can be proud of their six-story sandstone home at Grand Central Parkway and Bonneville Avenue. It truly is a wonderful sight for those driving through the Spaghetti Bowl. But its true beauty cannot be appreciated unless you examine it closely. It contains a wonderful amphitheater and a spectacular atrium, which hosts rotating exhibits. Unfortunately for the exhibits, the atrium itself often steals the show.

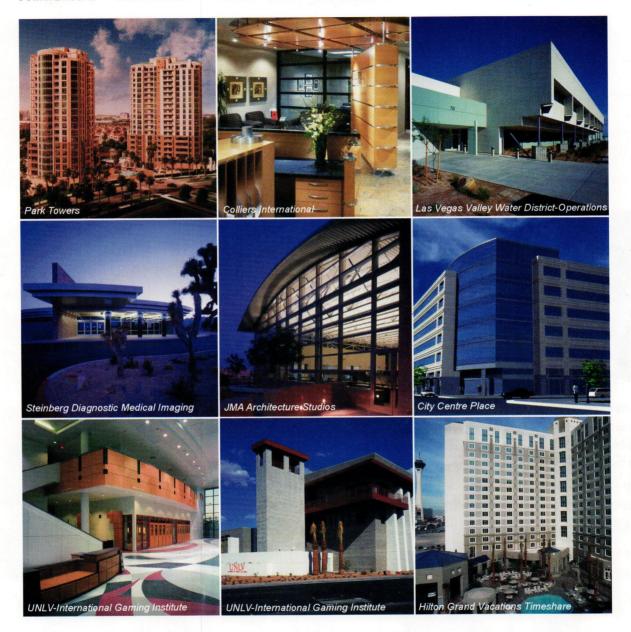
Just north of the Government Center rests 61 acres that the City of Las Vegas is acquiring. We will seek proposals to have it developed. Whatever we put there will be nothing less than spectacular—that I promise you. The architecture we see at work at the Government Center has set the standard for the development of the city's 61 acres, which I consider "the greatest piece of urban real estate in the country," and the rest of the land surrounding that site.

So Las Vegas is a very different place than it was just five years ago. *Architecture Las Vegas* is proof of that. I wish it all the best, and hope that it creates greater recognition of the importance of superb architecture—what it lends to the view we have of ourselves as a community and to our quality of life.

Oscar B. Goodman, mayor, City of Las Vegas

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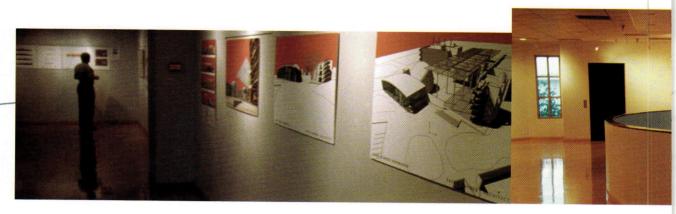
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The AIA Las Vegas Product Show revealed its glories, booth after booth. More than 100 exhibitors from the residential and commercial building industry filled a goodly portion of the Riviera's Royal Pavilion. Sponsors of the daylong event were Modernfold of Nevada and Jaynes Corporation. Pictured from left to right are: (6) Bob Weber, Glen Ashworth, Laura Jane Spina and Steve Carpenter; (7) Lisa Dove and Linda Hopton; (8) Mike Heisler, Ron Huff and John Diaz; (9) Bob Warner, LaMar Noorda and Gary Howlett; (10) Rob Davis, Carol Coleman and Dan Cantley; (11) Gary Evangelista, Cesar Solorzano and Fidel Solano; (12) Denise and Tim Fleming; (13) Nelson Steinmentz, Gary Vogel and John Wright; (14) Jerry Micili, Henry Sknoieczny and Rachel O'Neill; and (15) Ed Forlani, Clifton Marshall, Kathy Wilson and Paige Ebeyer.





# architectural HAPPENINGS

AIA LAS VEGAS' ARCHITECTURE WEEK





The "Unbuilt Las Vegas: Images of Possible Places" exhibit opened AIA Las Vegas' Architecture Week 2000. Special guests at the reception, held in UNLV's Metcalf Gallery, included Jeffrey Koep, dean of the College of Fine Arts, and Jose Gamez, assistant professor of architecture, who explained the underlying concepts of the models and architectural plans displayed. Architects Henry Skonieczny, Alexander Nevsky, Robert Gurdison and Michael Crowe joined Randy Lavigne, executive director of AIA Nevada, and Eric Strain, president of AIA Las Vegas, in commemorating the evening. Pictured from left to right are: (1) Wendy Lane, Robert Dorgan and Jose Gamez; (2) Kelly Lavigne and Randy Lavigne with Attila Lawrence, interim director of UNLV's School of Architecture; (3) Pedro Castellano and Lauro Urbina; (4) Mike Alcorn, Robert Gurdison, Douglas Schneider and Adrian Jones; and (5) Michael Crowe.













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#### **Glitter and Rust**

Can the raw design of the Guggenheims mesh with Strip fantasia to give us a museum peace? BY SCOTT DICKENSHEETS

PONDERING THE ADVENT OF THE VENETIAN'S DOUBLE-barreled Guggenheims (and can we go ahead and submit to linguistic inevitability and begin calling them "the Googs" now?), one can't help but ask: What are museums—particularly in the context of the Las Vegas Strip—supposed to be?

As designed by acclaimed Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, the massive Guggenheim Las Vegas (to open in the summer) and the compact Guggenheim-Hermitage (spring) would appear to be this: anti-casinos. Consider the 8,000-square-foot smaller facility—a partnership between the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Russia's Hermitage Museum—which will be built, inside and out, of rusted steel and sited next to the resort's main entrance.

Anti-casino? It's practically anti-*architecture*, at least as that term is understood on the Strip in its Late Megaresort Age.

"The use of raw steel conforms to a long-held Modernist belief that buildings should be an expression of their era," Los Angeles Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote when the designs were unveiled last fall. "The gallery will not be disguised under lay-

ers of ornamentation. Its raw beauty reminds us that we live in a postindustrial age, not Renaissance or Baroque Venice."

The larger museum, while it won't be visible from the street, will also be utterly unlike anything else in the neighborhood. With its 70-foot ceilings and a ceiling-mounted crane—not to mention a trench (with a removable transparent covering) running the length of the floor—Koolhaas, winner of the 2000 Pritzker Prize, has designed a space more akin to a hangar than the gilded temple of art most surely expected. "In effect, the building is a vast machine for transporting and viewing art," Ouroussoff wrote.

A rusty steel box and a giant industrial shed inset in the fantasy architecture of the Venetian—and, by extension, the fantasy architecture of Las Vegas Boulevard—will certainly strike a discordant note. (That's not out of character for the Guggenheim; these facilities will be the latest in a line of distinctive museums that includes Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral Guggenheim in New York, and Frank Gehry's biomorphous, titanium-skinned Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain.) Will the Googs repudiate or complement the prevailing approach to architecture that has made Las Vegas a design icon?







NEW YORK'S GUGGENHEIM (RIGHT) ALONGSIDE OURS: THE HERMITAGE (TOP) AND THE VEGAS.

"Will it be a blot on the Strip? I would say no," says UNLV art historian Robert Tracy. "It will be different, and that fact alone will be controversial; some could conclude that it's a blot on the Strip because it's so different. But that is also the structure's strength. ... I think it is healthy to the life of museums to be risk-takers rather than stagnant morgues." In fact, he sees Koolhassian style infiltrating the Strip. "I can see the proposed monorail system, with its various stations, picking up on the Koolhaas design," he says.

"Koolhaas' art machine is meant as an alternative to Las Vegas' own machinery of seduction," Ouroussoff wrote. "It is a courageous act."

But is it a lasting one? This city, after all, has smoothly incorporated a black-glass pyramid, a Disney-esque castle, a fake skyline and a pipsqueak Eiffel Tower into one all-inclusive Vegaesthetic. Can the Googs maintain their autonomy in such a co-optive atmosphere, or will they eventually become just another megaresort come-on?

"There will be those who say [the museums] are nothing more than upscale casino greeters," Tracy concludes. "But history will prove these skeptics wrong."

Scott Dickensheets is a senior editor at Las Vegas Life.

# A Book on Buildings—in Nevada, of All Places

MOST BOOKS ABOUT LOCAL ARCHITECTURE CELEBRATE OR THEORIZE what we've done here, and the writers only have eyes for the Strip. Alan Hess, author of *Viva Las Vegas: After-Hours Architecture*, once told this reviewer that there isn't much of interest here, architecturally speaking, beyond the Strip.

Those begging to differ now have a text to work from. Julie Nicoletta's *Buildings of Nevada* (Oxford University Press, \$45) is a tireless inventory of the state's architecturally intriguing structures. Addressing the state by region, it's arranged in a wonderfully easy-to-use, item-by-item format, and most of those items aren't on the Strip. It's great fun to page through, looking up buildings—from well-knowns such as the Las Vegas Library to eyebrow-raisers such as a Downtown duplex.

Nicoletta leaves no cornerstone unturned: She finds buildings worthy of mention in little Wellington, in Logandale, even at the Nevada Test Site. Many are old government and commercial buildings, of course, some of them leftovers from the state's various mining heydays (the 1898 school in Wadsworth), but there are plenty of houses listed, too (the Tudor Revival at 610 South Seventh Street), and all the expected casinos.

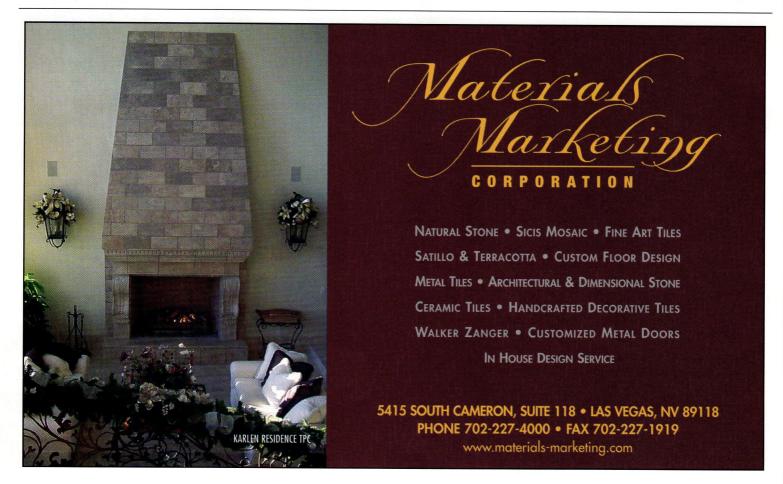
Nicoletta differs from the Vegas-book norm in another significant way. Buildings of Nevada is a guide, not a tract; her goal isn't to shoehorn carefully selected Vegas buildings into a snappy design philosophy. Her point seems to be simply that Nevada has lots of interesting buildings. Consequently, while she offers mild assessments of some buildings, she doesn't often pass an actual judgment. She sticks to interesting facts: Did you know Luxor was designed "to function as a sign directed less at motorists than at airline passengers"? This reviewer either.

That trait sometimes makes for a curious neutrality. This is her strongest statement about the Fremont Street Experience, one of the most conflicted structures in recent memory: "Its construction has certainly compromised this historic area of Las Vegas." On City Hall, that 10-story embodiment of government turning a cold shoulder to the governed: "It can hardly be called welcoming." Certainly compromised ...? Hardly welcoming ...? Nicoletta may have achieved a previously unknown level of understatement there.

In an era where we're used to having our every experience mediated, spun and garlanded with commentary, the book occasionally leaves us hankering for some point of view: Reading the item on Luxor, for example, we long to know what she thinks of the damn thing. Is it a cool building? Did the extra room towers muck it up? No clue.

That minor quibble eventually subsides. Nicoletta's agenda-free approach is probably for the best. The buildings stand on their own.

- Scott Dickensheets



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#### Where Public Meets Land

Las Vegan exploring designs that link built and natural environments

REBECCA TALBOTT, A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP SPECIALIST WITH THE U.S. Forest Service, is in residence this academic year at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. A native of the Pacific Northwest, she recently transferred to Las Vegas to coordinate efforts among local federal land management agencies—National Park, Forest, Fish and Wildlife, and BLM—in developing stronger connections between the community and the surrounding natural areas.

Talbott was instrumental in creating the Outside Las Vegas Foundation, a new partnership bridging the private-government divide to ensure the stewardship of public lands. Her seminal work in this area is based on the precept that "a new paradigm of public land management is required, in which government evolves from the doer of all things to the facilitator." This, she says, will provide "an opportunity to engage people in a manner that transcends to a sense of personal responsibility, ownership and advocacy for these resources."

With a new role for government and the increased demand for recreation, Talbott has been concerned with the linkages between people and place—between the booming built environment and the natural environment. "The great strength of the public lands surrounding Las Vegas," she says, "is that they provide an array of experiences,

from primitive, unconfined solitude and wilderness to highly developed, such as Boulder Beach." A key element to handling this diversity is design: "Looking at

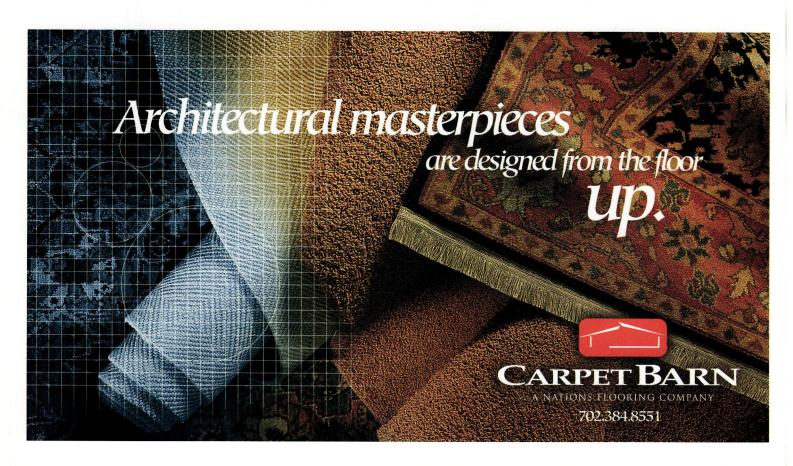
the broader levels of scale, mapping recreational opportunities, addressing how people move through the landscape, quality facility design that meets varied needs."

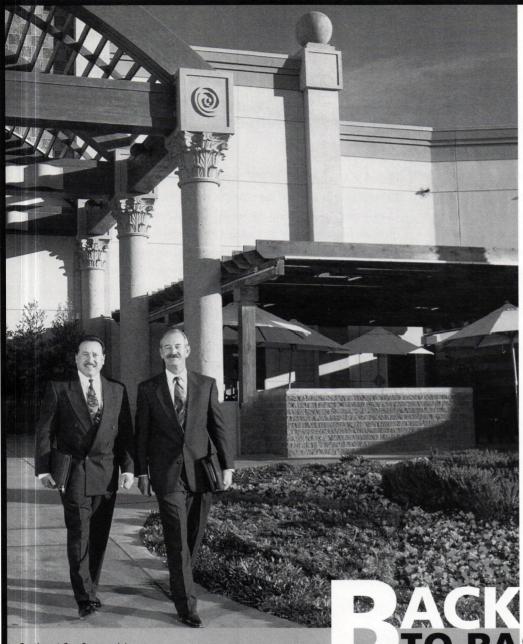
Talbott is using the rich resources at Harvard to further develop these concepts. The Loeb Fellowships in Advanced Environmental Studies annually provide a stipend of \$25,000 (plus housing and other benefits) to 10 midcareer professionals who are committed to "shaping urban and natural spaces that are attractive, functional, civil and broadly accessible to all people."

There are more than 100 applications annually, but the GSD is actively seeking greater participation from the mountain west region. "They are really intrigued by us," says Talbott, the first fellow from Nevada. "Las Vegas is a place they love to hate. They cannot fathom that we might be interested in such things."

Full information is available on the website (www.gsd.harvard.edu|loebfell) or by talking with fellowship coordinator Sally Young at (617) 495-9345.

— Christopher Hagen





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Southwest Gas Commercial Team pictured from left to right: Abe Pallan, John Wright. TO BASICS

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#### **New and Notable**

#### Courthouse honors ... A new gateway to Downtown ... A bigger Stratosphere

HCA-DWORSKY HAS WON TWO AWARDS FOR ITS WORK ON THE NEW Lloyd D. George Federal Courthouse: *Southwest Contractor Magazine's* Best of 2000 and the General Services Administration Design Award. Last year, the project team, a joint effort between HCA Architects of Las Vegas and Dworsky Associates of Los Angeles, won in the Unbuilt category of the AIA Las Vegas Design Awards.

The building itself (pictured) has opened the door to revitalizing Downtown, and other projects are falling in line.

The much-heralded Neonopolis is finally under way, and Kitchell Contractors should have it open by early spring of 2002. The building is designed by Reginald Yee of RTKL Associates Inc., Los Angeles. The total project cost for Neonopolis and an adjacent city-built garage is estimated at \$100 million.

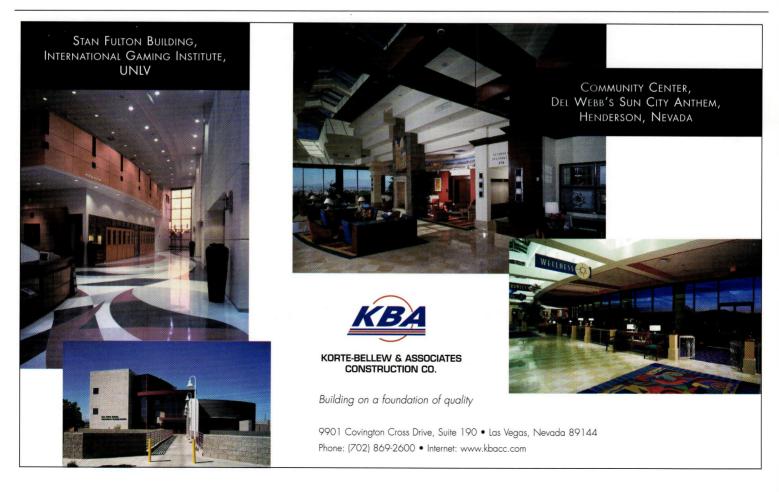
JMA Architecture Studios, with interior-design manager Jonelle Vance, has directed a "complete architectural modification" of the 25-year-old Bank of America Plaza's lobby and common areas—changing the color scheme and materials for a brighter, classier "Class A" office look. Construction of the \$6.5 million project, by Crissi, is expected to be completed in early January.

Denver developer Bill Pauls will give Downtown a new Class A office building-

the first in a quarter century. City Center Place, with its 110,000 square feet and \$20 million price tag, will open early in the third quarter at Fourth Street and Lewis Avenue. The city, which will be making Lewis Avenue more pedestrian-friendly, has erected an adjoining 580-space, \$7 million parking garage. Contractors are Korte Bellew and Associates for the garage, and Martin Harris Construction for the offices. JMA designed both.

The City of Las Vegas will erect a "new gateway to downtown" on the south side of Stewart Avenue between Las Vegas Boulevard and Fourth Street. The 30,000-square-foot City Hall addition and seven-story parking garage is designed by Kittrell Garlock & Associates to "carry City Hall's unusual architecture and existing types and textures of materials to the new parking structure." Korte-Bellew & Associates Construction Company will begin the \$15 million project early this year.

The city is pursuing developers for the 61-acre Union Pacific Railroad site. This year it also expects to acquire the historic Downtown post office on Stewart Avenue. The parking lot surrounding it will become a park for the growing number of office workers and Downtown residents, while thoughts on the building include a community center or arts college.





Another major project is under way at the city's origins, Big Springs, where the Las Vegas Valley Water District is creating the 180-acre Las Vegas Springs Natural Preserve. Infrastructure work will begin next year, with completion scheduled for the

centennial celebration in 2005. The schematic design was done by a team, including Lucchesi-Galati Architects of Las Vegas. The final design work has been broken into six pieces, and successful bidders will be announced early this year. There will be two main structures: a visitors center with a projected cost of \$34.8 million and a "living desert center" complex estimated at \$16.2 million.

Exciting residential developments are in the offing as well. The Tom Hom Group of San Diego is about to get under way on two new buildings. San Diego architect Rob Wellington Quigley is preparing the working drawings for Will Builder Corporation, an affiliate of Tom Hom. Construction will begin this spring. Both edifices will have commercial spaces at street level, facing Las Vegas Boulevard, with apartments above. Tom Hom President Will Newbern says Le Octaine, costing \$6.7 million and located at Gass Avenue, will have 51 units, with about 40 percent being subsidized housing. The \$15 million Kirby Lofts is at Hoover Avenue; its 300 units will be about 75 percent "affordable" and 25 percent "market rate."

#### On Campus

There has been a flurry of activity at UNLV. Besides the Lied Library and Beam Music Building (see Page 40), the following projects are in the works:

• The Tonopah Hall companion residence hall, designed by DMJM Architects, will be completed by Clark and Sullivan Contractors at a cost of \$15 million.

- Stacey Enterprises Inc. will complete a \$2.5 million bookstore addition and renovation in March, doubling the size to 20,000 square feet. Carpenter Sellers Associates designed the blending of the two to provide a "new look."
- The Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center is the next campus project. Four architects have entered a competition to design the 20,000-square-foot building with a project budget of \$5 million. Bidding will be in the fall of 2001, with scheduled completion a year later.

#### **Hospitality**

By the end of the year PCL Construction Services will complete the 1.3 million-square-foot, \$150 million Convention and Visitors Authority project. The Domingo Cambeiro Corporation-designed addition will arch over Desert Inn Road, bringing the Convention Center to 3.1 million square feet.

Two hotel-casinos generaled by Perini Building Company are scheduled to open late this year. John Jerde of Venice Beach, who designed Bellagio and Treasure Island, is architect of the Maloof family's new venture, the Palms on West Flamingo Road. The 470-room complex, opening December 12, will cost \$265 million and feature a 1,200-seat concert hall and 14-screen IMAX theater. Its 42 stories will make it our tallest hotel.

The second Perini project is the as-yet-unnamed \$275 million joint venture between Station Casinos and America Nevada Corporation in Green Valley Ranch. The Friedmutter Group has designed the 40-acre site to include a 54,000-square-foot casino, 200 rooms and the customary Station restaurant and theater ancillaries. Glenn Christenson, chief financial officer for Station, has called this "the crown jewel of the Green Valley master plan—more upscale than our other properties."



but our commitment to EXCELLENCE in design and service is as strong as ever

This year, the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects will host a variety of meetings and events for its members and the community. AIA Membership Meetings are informal gatherings that provide an opportunity for members to network and discuss activities in the architectural community, and they are usually planned around informative programs. In addition, AIA Las Vegas will invite other organizations to participate in joint meetings.

#### **KLAI-JUBA LECTURES**

Klai-Juba Architects funds this program allowing the UNLV School of Architecture to bring in some of the nation's most respected design professionals to present and discuss their work. Planned primarily for the students, these lectures are open to the public and hosted by AIA Las Vegas. Katrina Ruedi, Dana Cuff and Bernard Tschumi are three of the speakers scheduled this year.

#### **GET OUT OF TOWN**

To see what's going on in other communities, the AIA has a "Bus Trips" series. The first one of 2001 will be to San Diego in the spring to explore the latest in

landscaping. For a fresh perspective on the theatrical, a summer trip is planned to the Utah Shakespearean Theatre in Cedar City.

#### SPECIAL EVENTS

The AIA Las Vegas golf and putting tournaments have become annual traditions. The Spring Putting Tournament will be April 6, and the Fall Putting Tournament will be September 7, both at Angel Park Golf Course. The annual AIA Golf Tournament is scheduled for June 8 at the Badlands Golf Course. Make reservations early.

#### **AWARDS PROGRAMS**

Each year AIA Nevada salutes the finest design projects and the most important community and professional contributions in the state through the AIA Nevada Design Awards and Service Awards Programs. This year AIA Las Vegas will host these events, with a banquet and awards ceremony in October.

The Intern Design Competition—launched in January, with awards in April—will include a report from the winner of last year's competition regarding travels and experiences as the Dotcom Award winner.

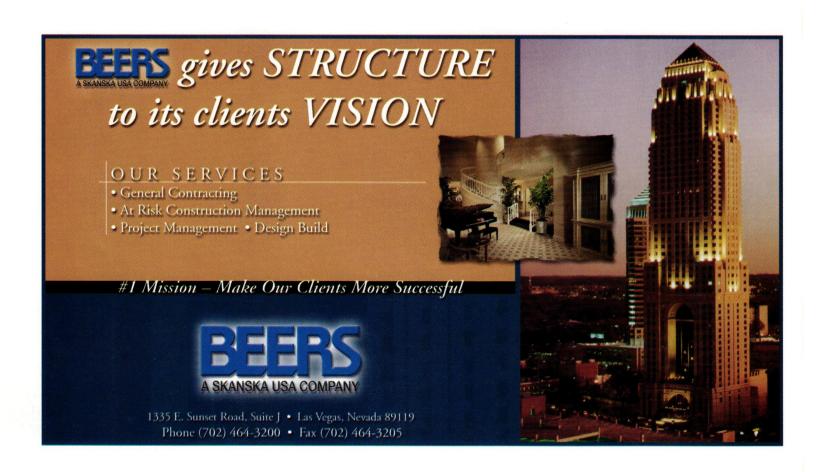
#### THE AIA SUMMER DESIGN LECTURE SERIES

This summer, AIA members and the public will have the opportunity to meet some of the Southwest's most daring and innovative design professionals and to see their work in exhibitions. This program is made possible through a grant from the Nevada Council on the Arts.

#### ARCHITECTURE WEEK IN LAS VEGAS

Each year AIA Las Vegas designates one week to concentrate on the importance of art, architecture and our built environment. The next Architecture Week, October 8-13, will feature exhibits, lectures, forums, events and activities celebrating this unique city. The AIA Product Show on October 11 and the AIA Nevada Design Awards Banquet on October 13 are two of the main events.

AIA Las Vegas is the professional association for local architects and design professionals. Established in 1956, the non-profit organization provides programs and events in an effort to increase public awareness of architecture and the importance of quality design in our communities. For more information, call 895-0936 or visit the website, <a href="https://www.aianevada.org">www.aianevada.org</a>.



#### aia CALENDAR

#### KLAI-JUBA LECTURE SERIES

#### January 16, Katrina Ruedi

6 p.m., UNLV School of Architecture.

#### March 28, Dana Cuff and Garth Rockcastle

6 p.m., UNLV School of Architecture.

#### April 18, Bernard Tschumi

6 p.m., UNLV School of Architecture.

#### November 14, to be announced

6 p.m., UNLV School of Architecture.

#### MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

#### January 17, "The Selection Process"

Panel discussion with Public Works Department representatives from Clark County, City of Las Vegas, Henderson and North Las Vegas. 11:30 a.m. luncheon. Location TBD.

#### February 21, "Winning Design Awards"

Panel discussion with the jurors of the 2000 Design Awards Program. Reception 6 p.m.

#### March 28, "Ethics of Practice"

Dana Cuff and Garth Rockcastle. Luncheon. UNLV School of Architecture. Time TBD.

#### April 25, AIA High School Design Awards Program and Scholarship Presentations

6 p.m., UNLV School of Architecture.

#### May 16, Lake Mead Dinner Cruise

June 20, AIA Night at the Las Vegas Stars Baseball Game

#### July 11, "Urban Design & Allied Member Appreciation"

11:30 a.m. luncheon. Location TBD.

#### August 15, Hard-hat tour of a current project

Time and location TBD.

#### September 19, "How to Become an Architect"

Daylong event, UNLV School of Architecture. Time TBD.

#### October 10, AIA Product Show

4-8 p.m., Riviera Royale Pavilion.

#### November 14, Luncheon Meeting

Speaker and location TBD.

#### December 12, Holiday Celebration and Installation of Officers

6 p.m. Location TBD.

#### CONFERENCES AND CONVENTIONS

#### February 14-18, Grassroots Leadership Conference

Washington, D.C.

#### May 18-21, AIA National Convention

Denver.

#### September 20-14, WMR Conference

Yellowstone National Park.

#### AIA SPECIAL EVENTS

#### April 6, Spring Putting Tournament

6:30 p.m., Angel Park.

#### June 8, Annual Golf Tournament

Noon, Badlands Golf Course.

#### Sept. 7, Fall Putting Tournament

6:30 p.m., Angel Park.

#### June-August, Summer Design Lecture Series

October 8-13, Architecture Week in Las Vegas

October 13, AIA Nevada Design Awards Banquet and Silent Auction

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**GREEN VALLEY RANCH** 

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# the contest ... in

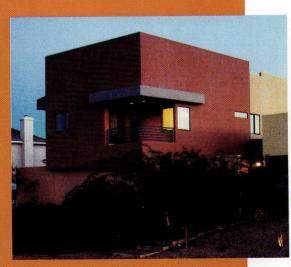
We go behind the scenes with the state's AIA jury to make sense of winning designs

CONCEDES BUILT | UNBUILT | STUDENT

# design AWARDS







# context

BY WILLIAM L. FOX

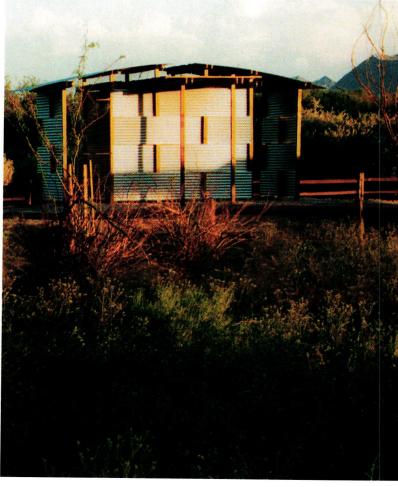
# Architecture

competitions have been held throughout America at local, state, regional and national levels, and you'd think that by now someone would have figured out how to get around their biggest drawback: the lack of local context for the buildings being judged. Or, as Herbert Muschamp, the pre-

eminent architectural writer, put it recently in *The New York Times*, perhaps the term "context" legitimizes buildings that merely copy their surroundings, and a better term might be "relational" design, which allows for structures that may be startlingly different from their neighbors, but nonetheless make sense in place.

Nevada, of course, poses some severe contextual problems; the urban fabrics of Las Vegas and Reno, the cities from which the majority of the 64 projects were submitted to the 2000 American Institute of Architects Design Awards, are pastiches of radical styles far beyond that found in many other places. One of the world's largest hotels, which may be dressed to evoke Renaissance Italy or contemporary New York, will sit near industrial warehouses, seedy motels left over from the 1950s and a modernist clump of public offices.





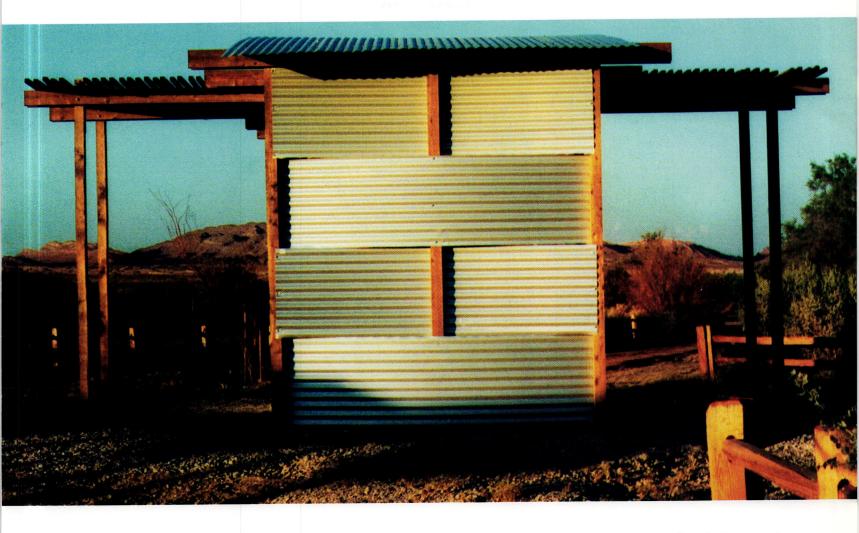
Just as form and function are so inextricably bound together in that artificial force field we call architecture, so is the process of judging to its subject matter, and the four out-of-state judges brought up the lack of context several times during the daylong adjudication held in Sparks last September. Sitting in a chilly and windowless convention meeting room at the Nugget hotel-casino, which illustrated their dilemma with poignant irony, they looked at submissions in three categories—Built, Unbuilt and Student—ranging from an opulent hotel-casino, which cost \$785 million, to an information kiosk for the Las Vegas Wash that was built in a single day from off-the-shelf materials. The final results, however, fit into the context of both Nevada and the state of contemporary architecture with distinction.

The jurors were charged with judging the singular merit of each submission and not placing them in competition with each other. This was a somewhat futile gesture, since the only context available to the judges were the entries themselves. And sometimes the choices were close ones, the only basis for final decisions sometimes resting exactly on how successfully one building stacked up against another. And

here, where the biases of the individual judges showed up, is where the genius of the peer-review system counterbalanced the lack of local knowledge.

DURING A FEW MINUTES of preliminary shaking down, the judges share their critical criteria. Danelle Guthrie, a practicing architect from West Hollywood who has taught at the avant-garde school Sci-Arc, admits her desire to weigh how well the rhetoric of the presentations matches the actual projects. Mark Reddington, a design partner in a Seattle firm specializing in large public projects, including the current expansion of the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, desires to balance the pragmatics of construction with habitability and design excellence. Sandy Miller, a professor of architecture in Los Angeles, and likewise an active practitioner, comes off as a savvy street-level populist. Kristine Woolsey from Arizona, another practitioner who teaches, by contrast confesses to being a formalist addicted to beauty. In sum, the geographical diversity is matched by an aesthetic one, and the entries will be triangulated from at least three different opinions all along the way.

# design AWARDS



Looking first at the built, then the unbuilt, and finally the student submissions, the judges in the first round walk along the folding tables, flipping pages of photographs and drawings, and in 45 minutes cull out roughly half the entries. Some churches, rustic homes and medical buildings, as well as a smattering of public buildings, are set aside. Each has at least one feature with merit—a nice interior space here, a bit of clever fabrication there, for instance—but perhaps the building as a whole mixes too many stylistic details, and therefore doesn't "hang together," or maybe it lacks enough public places necessary for it to fulfill its function. And sometimes the building was too obviously about the architect, not its function or the client's needs.

LUCCHESI GALATI ARCHITECTS DESIGNED THE WETLANDS PARK INFORMATION KIOSK WITH NATURAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN MIND. THE WOOD ECHOS THE VEGETATION, WHILE THE CORRUGATED STEEL PANELS REFLECT THE PARK'S LIGHT AND COLORS. THE WEAVE STRUCTURE RECALLS NATIVE INDIAN BASKETS.

At this point, taking a quick break, the judges are curious why there are so few projects that have been submitted; this, too, is a matter of context. While Nevada may be the fastest-growing state in the union, and Las Vegas may issue more building permits per month than Los Angeles, the nature of the construction is often geared more to the utilitarian needs of a young business engaged in serving the growth itself, versus a mature one that can invest in image as well as product development. High-end residences tend to be simply scaled-up versions of tract homes, and not aesthetic statements more appropriate to someone's lifetime achievements. Plenty is being built, but most design in the state is cookie-cutter work.

The next stage, which takes the rest of the morning, finds each judge sitting down, paging slowly through the remaining 29 entries. Before lunch they reluctantly weed out nine more. In one case, at least according to the photographs, the interior space and light remain unresolved, the edges of what should be discrete functional spaces blurry and dull. In another, the complicated siting of a massive building seems to indicate the lack of a coherent plan for the site.









It's after lunch when things get ruthless, opinions are sharpened, and it becomes apparent just how the panel can overcome the shortcomings of the process. Starting with the built projects, it's obvious everyone is in love with the Clark County Wetlands Park Information Kiosk (Lucchesi Galati Architects), a foursquare shelter constructed of corrugated metal and wooden posts. Despite some doubts about how information panels will be attached on the inside, and the fact that this is the project with the most modest of intentions (not to mention cost), it is so nearly zen in match of form to function that it is the undisputed favorite of the group.

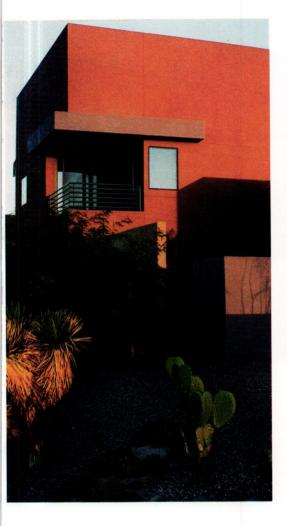
The Scott Meek & Son Concrete Company office building (Bigotti Architects) in Reno is the next project upon which everyone agrees. A one-story structure meant to demonstrate the versatility of concrete to the company's clientele, it features an eight-foot-high concrete wall that traverses the building, all of which is sheltered under a shed-like roof with exposed trusses. The detailing executed in variously finished concrete is profuse, including some of the furniture executed inside. But in this case, it does all hold together, given the consistency of material. The building

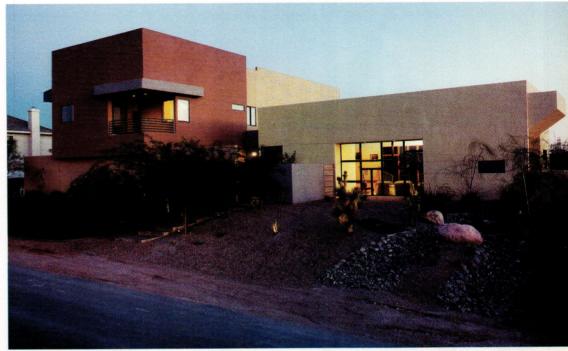
is cost-conscious, and the involvement of the client in the design and construction process is obvious and playful. This is a perfect example, as well, of the difference between contextual and relational architecture. The building fits into the industrial surroundings, but has clearly raised the bar for design in the area. Both this and the wetlands project are given "honors," the top level of award.

Two projects also share "merit" status, the next award level, and it's clear that the judges, by handing out recognition to more than one entry in some categories, are addressing the warning to not put projects into competition with one another. The "Bunker" in Reno (Cathexes Inc.) is a mixed-use redevelopment of, and addition to, an existing rundown auto repair shop. It's a jazzy urban infill with, as Miller puts it, "great street-level rhythm," and includes a restaurant with cigar bar, a beauty shop and a surgical outpatient clinic. The judges admire the imitation concertina wire along one upper edge of the project that tweaks the nose of gentrification.

The other built project of merit is the Mesquite Veterinarian Clinic (ericStrain

# design AWARDS





THE OFFICE OF THE SCOTT MEEK & SONS CONCRETE
COMPANY (OPPOSITE) USES UPRIGHT CONCRETE
ELEMENTS TO EMPHASIZE THE MATERIAL'S
VERSATILITY. THE GARDNER RESIDENCE (THIS PAGE AND
OPPOSITE BOTTOM) ENGAGES ITS DESERT SETTING
THROUGH A SERIES OF COURTYARDS THAT BLUR THE
LINE BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE.

Architect), a series of inexpensive and colorful boxes nicely massed together. It's whimsical, yet the sitings of the facility and entrances to the street have been carefully thought out. Everything is logical in placement, and the dog prints embedded in the sidewalk outside even serve as signage. Once again, the judges show their mutual preferences for architecture that are sensible yet fun, cost-effective but memorable.

Receiving a "citation" (an honorable mention, if you will) is the Court House in Las Vegas (ericStrain Architect). The only residence to be honored in the competition, it is a 6,000-square-foot modernist collection of themed spaces built by a radiologist. All the rooms—each representing a place the family has previously lived—are centered around several courtyards. It's a brilliant concept, perhaps flawed in execution with the slightly odd placement of windows and doors that seems almost exhibitionist—but it's hard to tell without seeing the surrounding neighborhood.

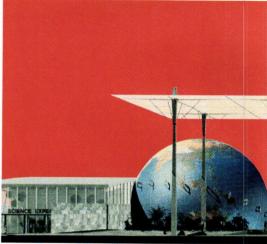
The unbuilt projects are next, and what the judges believe to be the single strongest project in any category is the Community College of Southern Nevada

Science Experience on West Charleston Boulevard (Tate & Snyder Architects). They positively coo over the computer-aided drawings, showing the bold mix of educational program with design, and give it the sole "honor" award in the category. A helixical exterior staircase embodying DNA, a sphere that turns the universe inside out by placing a planetarium inside a huge globe of the earth, a wall containing local geological strata ... it's what themed architecture can do at its highest level, teaching its users instead of confirming what they already know.

The proposed Mormon Fort Visitors Center (ericStrain Architect) is a low adobe and canvas complex that remains sensitive to its historical surroundings, yet is contemporary in execution. It utilizes passive environmental features to maximize evaporative cooling from a pond, and provides a gateway that gently detaches visitors from the present in order to experience the past more fully. For these reasons, it receives a "merit" award.

Going all out now to make a point, the judges decide to award citations to three unbuilt projects. The partially completed Regional Justice Center (Tate & Snyder







Architects), located Downtown, contains 700,000 square feet of government court-rooms and offices in a series of individually bland buildings, designed within a night-mare of security protocols and federal construction regulations. Definitely a human gesture to the public it serves, the building makes a handsome modernist statement in keeping with its stature.

Clark County's Center for Enterprise and Information Technology building (Holmes Sabatini Associates Architects) will be, in the words of one judge, "a reptilian helmet." But what can you expect of a building that will house the equipment to handle every computerized function of local government—a facility where the drawings specify how many pounds of explosive force it can withstand per square inch? It's so straightforward and functional that the only aesthetic components are in the details of the building, an odd enough challenge to be compelling.

The final citation for an unbuilt project is given to the Nate Mack Elementary School Wetlands Lab (ericStrain Architect). Students were involved in the design process, which utilizes rammed earth as the primary construction

method. Both the design and construction processes are innovative. For example, since the school district requires that its buildings have no windows in order to minimize vandalism, the design calls for garage doors that can be rolled up and down, providing apertures through which a wetlands courtyard will penetrate the classroom.

There are only two student submissions because there is only one architecture school in the state—UNLV's—and entries were due at a time when its students were cramming for finals. A citation is awarded to a complicated and ambitious proposal for a Graduate and Visiting Faculty Hall, a series of colorful towers united by a roof designed as an airfoil, which is integral to the heating and cooling of the building. The plan's not fully resolved, but is thoughtful, painstaking and has solid intentions.

Held until the end is the single hotel-casino under consideration. Although the four architects are impressed with the accumulation of recast historical detail, they can't judge from the documentation how well its several buildings function.

## design AWARDS



A THREE-STORY GLASS ATRIUM HIGHLIGHTS THE DOWNTOWN REGIONAL JUSTICE CENTER (RENDERED IN ORANGE). THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN NEVADA'S SCIENCE BUILDING (IN RED) FEATURES A GLOBE BUILDING, A STAIRWAY MODELED ON DNA AND A REPLICA OF LOCAL STRATA.



For example, it's impossible to tell how the sense of progression works from the entrance, through the public promenades and lobby, and onto the gaming floor, the shopping venues or the rooms. And the last ... well, the less said about the interior of most hotel rooms, the better. The best the judges can do is declare that hotel-casino projects are stage sets deserving a separate award category and leave the project unrecognized.

THE JUDGES ARE FINISHED at 4 o'clock and it's time for a glass of wine next door. But before adjourning, they share their overall comments. They voice admiration for a certain raw and informal touch to some of the designs, which they attribute in part to the desert environment. Shade devices are obvious, stairways open to the exterior, that sort of thing. "No pretense to high finish" is another way to put it—traditional in the Intermountain West. Another consensus is that there's almost always clear evidence that Nevada's population is a car culture; these are buildings that you drive up to.

None of the projects made a strong case for retro revival statements, though a couple came close. Instead, the panel saw more in the use of indigenous and appropriate materials, as in the concrete company building. In New York, an architectural competition might struggle to encompass historical preservation projects alongside new architecture; here it's a question of how "historical excerpting" can be viewed alongside the contemporary.

In summary, one judge said: "These aren't the prettiest buildings in the state, but ones where the site, materials, context, function and aesthetic intent all come together clearly with an element of innovation. The designs have authenticity, and they make discoveries, which means we learned something from them and remember them when we walk out of this room."

Perhaps that's the ultimate context, in fact. The house of memory.

Bill Fox, a former director of the state arts council, is a Los Angeles-based author as well as a columnist for Las Vegas Life magazine.

# 2000 AIA Nevada Design Awards

#### HONOR AWARDS

#### **Unbuilt Category**

#### Community College of Southern Nevada Science Experience

Architect: Tate & Snyder Architects, Henderson

Design Team: J. Windom Kimsey, AIA, Kevin Kemner, AIA, Michael Crowe, AIA, Lester Ferdinand, Simon Kim, George Babakitis, Rob Fruland, Ken Ozawa, Ziao X Tran, Mike

Thompson, Marc Gabriel, Barbara Griffin and Sharon Carson

Interior Designer: Tate & Snyder Architects

Structural Engineer: Leslie E. Robertson Associates (LERA)

Electrical Engineer: Ove Arup

Mechanical Engineer: Ove Arup, Alan Locke

Civil Engineer: Lochsa

Owner/Developer: Community College of Southern Nevada Photographer: Opulence Studios (model photography) Others Involved: West Office Exhibit Design

#### **Built Category**

#### Scott Meek & Sons Concrete Company Office Building

Architect: Angela Bigotti, AIA, and Joel Sherman, Reno Interior Designer: Angela Bigotti and Joel Sherman Landscape Architect: Angela Bigotti and Joel Sherman

Structural Engineer: Rocky Woods, PE Owner/Developer: Scott Meek and Scott Farrell

Photography: Angela Bigotti

#### Clark County Wetlands Park Information Kiosk

Architect: Lucchesi Galati Architects, Las Vegas

Design Team: Jeffrey J. Bender, RA, Jeff Roberts, AIA, and Lance Kirk Landscape Architect: Clark County Department of Parks & Recreation Owner/Developer: Clark County Department of Parks & Recreation General Contractor: Clark County Department of Parks & Recreation Photographers: Auchorite Galati Architects (Jeff Roberts AIA) and Lance

Photographers: Lucchesi Galati Architects (Jeff Roberts, AIA, and Lance Kirk)
Others Involved: The American Express Corporation, as well as community activists

and volunteers.

#### MERIT AWARDS

#### **Unbuilt Category**

#### Nate Mack Elementary School Wetlands Lab

Architect: ericStrain Architect, Las Vegas

Design Team: Eric Strain, AIA, and Doug Schneider

Landscape Architect: ericStrain Architect Structural Engineer: Mendenhall Smith Electrical Engineer: T.J. Krob

Mechanical Engineer: Petty and Associates

Civil Engineer: Lochsa

#### **Built Category**

#### Mesquite Veterinary Clinic

Architect: ericStrain Architect, Las Vegas Design Team: Eric Strain, AIA, and Mark Murray Landscape Architect: ericStrain Architect

Structural Engineer: Mendenhall Smith Electrical Engineer: Harris Engineers Mechanical Engineer: Harris Engineers

Civil Engineer: Pentacore

General Contractor: Watts Construction

#### The Bunker

Architect: Cathexes Inc., Reno

Design Team: Donald J. Clark, AIA, James D. Molder, Associate AIA

Interior Designer: Cathexes Inc.

Landscape Architect: Cathexes Inc.

Structural Engineer: Gabbart & Woods Engineering Electrical Engineer: Design/Build-Nelson Electric

Mechanical Engineer: Design/Build-Ray Heating Products Inc.

Civil Engineer: Summit Engineering Corporation

Owner/Developer: Urban Disturbance LLC and Pohaku LLC General Contractor: K-7 Construction/TNT Construction Photographer: James D. Molder and Allyson D. McStroul

#### CITATION AWARDS

#### **Unbuilt Category**

#### Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort Visitors Center

Architect: ericStrain Architect, Las Vegas

Design Team: Eric Strain, AIA, Dough Schneider, Adrian Jones

Landscape Architect: ericStrain Structural Engineer: Mendenhall Smith Electrical Engineer: T.J. Krob

Mechanical Engineer: Petty and Associates

Civil Engineer: Lochsa

Others Involved: Consortium West

#### **Regional Justice Center**

Architect: Tate & Snyder Architects, Las Vegas

Design Team: George Babakitis, Sharon Carson, Jon Drake, Rob Fruland, Marc Gabriel, Barbara Griffin, Shelly Hayden, Marina Hrenek, Vedran Hrenek, Simon Kim, J. Windom Kimsey, Denise Laspaluto, Onidio Mirabal, Ken Ozawa, Diana Payne, Paige Plautz, Mario Reyes, Bruce Schwartzman, Robin Stark, Mark Stitcha, Mike Thompson, Ziao Tran, Lynn

Tritton and Todd Vedelago

Interior designer: Tate & Snyder Architects, Lynn Tritton

Landscape Architect: J.W. Zunino

Structural Engineer: Leslie E. Robertson Associates (LERA); Bennett & Jimenez Electrical

Engineer: JBA Consulting Engineers

Mechanical Engineer: JBA Consulting Engineers Civil Engineers: Poggemeyer Design Group

Owner/Developer: Clark County, City of Las Vegas and State of Nevada

General Contractor: AF Construction
Others Involved: HDR, Court Consultants

#### **CEIT Operations Center**

Architects: Holmes Sabatini Architects, Henderson

Interior Designer: Holmes Sabatini Associates Architects, PC

Landscape Architect: Richard Marriotti, ASLA Structural Engineer: Brizedine Engineers

Electrical Engineer: T.J. Krob Consulting Engineers

Mechanical Engineer: Dunham Associates

Civil Engineer: Lochsa Engineering

Owner: Clark County Center for Enterprise & Information Technology Others Involved: Rancho Santa Fe Technologies, Technology Consultant

#### **Built Category**

#### The Gardner Residence ("The Court House")

Architect: ericStrain Architect, Las Vegas

Design Team: Eric Strain, AIA, and Stephanie Perrone

Landscape Architect: ericStrain Architect
Structural Engineer: MA Engineering

Mechanical Engineer: ETM Civil Engineer: Lochsa

General Contractor: Robbins Construction
Photographers: Charles Morgan and Wes Isbutt

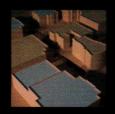
#### Student Category

#### Graduate & Visiting Faculty Residence Hall

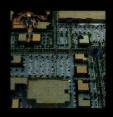
Architect: Lance Kirk, Associate AIA, Las Vegas



















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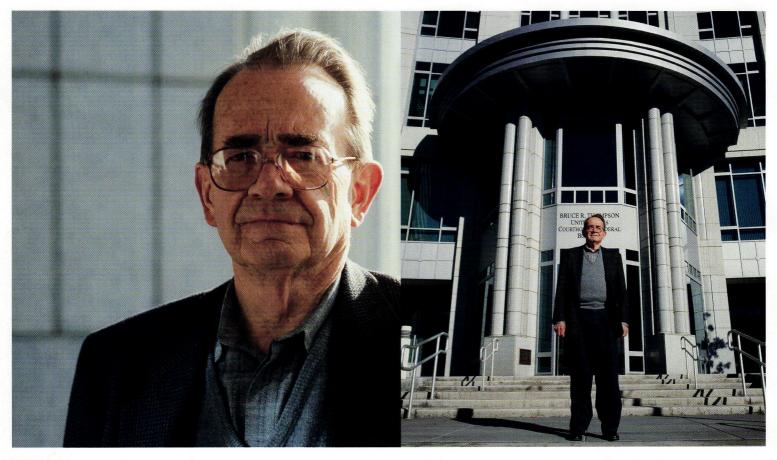












#### One Man's Statement

Ralph Casazza, winner of the state's highest honor, speaks his mind on Reno's blueprints, Vegas' lessons and overly funky architecture BY ELAINE MARSHALL

YOU CAN'T GET ANY MORE NEVADAN THAN RENO ARCHITECT RALPH Casazza, this year's recipient of the American Institute of Architects' Silver Medal—the most prestigious award the state can confer on one of its architects.

During his 50-year career, Casazza left his mark on Reno with tasteful and time-less designs, the sort of buildings that defy trends yet always look smart—sort of like Casazza himself. For a man in his mid-70s, he is sprightly and snazzily dressed. His face peers out from behind a massive pair of brown-framed glasses, and his pale fingers are slender and graceful. They are the fingers that have designed Reno's federal courthouse, the Lawlor Events Center and numerous buildings on the beautiful University of Nevada campus, and more. "If all the buildings I was involved in were zapped," he says, "you wouldn't recognize Reno."

Since retiring from architecture a year and a half ago, he bought the Shopper's

Square Mall on property that once was the Casazza family ranch—and is seeking approval to expand the mall two blocks, replacing more than 20 homes and a couple of strip malls in the process. Attracting business to the mall, and hence closer to downtown, led to another post-retirement project: to revitalize South Virginia Street, where most visitors get their first impressions of Reno.

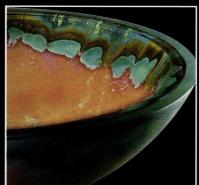
#### HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE RENOVATION OF RENO'S MAIN CORRIDOR?

South Virginia Street is heavily traveled by tourists between downtown Reno and the convention center, and it looks very, very shabby. So we contacted all the

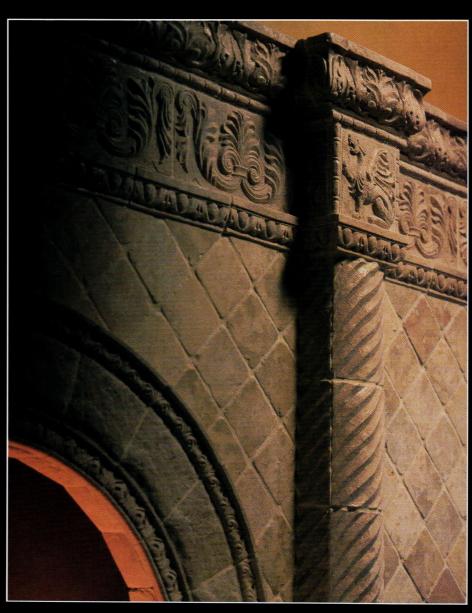
THE MAN AND HIS WORK: FRESHLY MINTED SILVER MEDALIST RALPH CASAZZA AND ONE OF HIS MORE SIGNFICIANT BUILDINGS, RENO'S FEDERAL COURTHOUSE.

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#### interview

property owners along the street and they said, "Well, Ralph, bring your plans to us and we'll see what we can do to help you." So that's the way it started. We've had a lot of people who have become very interested. They realize they have to do something with their property. ...

What it amounts to is taking all the power lines and burying them, landscaping, a completely new lighting system and encouraging new development. We'll try to develop some parking areas along South Virginia Street every block or two. People could stroll. There are a couple of different ideas for themes to the redevelopment. One that people have been pushing is an international theme. It's going to take time to do it. Of course you need money, but there are a lot of federal grants out there, and so we're making applications for federal grants. In the time we've been involved—six or seven months—we've accomplished a great deal. As long as my steam and the committee's steam runs, we'll get something happening.

#### HOW DO RENO AND LAS VEGAS COMPARE WHEN IT COMES TO ARCHITECTURE?

Projects in Vegas are a great deal larger. There are a half-dozen hotels in Vegas that are larger than all of downtown Reno. Just one hotel! I guess it's good Vegas has thrived. I wouldn't want to see Reno like Vegas, but I would like to see a lot more activity than we have. The Silver Legacy is the last brand new hotel that started from scratch in about the last seven years. The way I see it, we need a couple of more real nice hotels to encourage convention business.

#### WHAT CAN RENO LEARN FROM VEGAS?

I visit Vegas often and when I come back, I get disgusted with Reno. It seems that we do nothing in Reno but do surveys. Las Vegas is so far ahead of us they've left us in the dust. Every time they open a new hotel, it's just a lot more competition for Reno. The other thing Reno has got to learn—and this is something new Las Vegas has learned in just the last few years—is [to lure] families. We've got so much more to offer to the public than Vegas has. Vegas is just out there in the desert. There's nothing. We've got so much around here it's unbelievable. We haven't sold Reno like we should.

#### WHAT ARE NEVADA ARCHITECTS UP AGAINST THESE DAYS?

The bad thing I see is that in the past architects were given a lot more credit for their work in the design of a building than they are nowadays. We're coming into a new phase they call "design-build" architecture: An architect and a contractor will get together and do a design for a client. It does cut costs, but usually the dollar figure is at the top and you're not able to develop architecture like it should be developed. Typically an architect will design a building and it goes up to bid to general contractors. In design-building, a contractor will come up to an architect and say, "I've got a project, can you work with me? I'll assist you with the design, and I'll assure you get the job." And so forth. That eliminates the competition between the contractors. What happens is the contractor can cut a lot of corners and you don't get as quality a job.

#### WHAT'S A GOOD EXAMPLE IN NEVADA?

Reno's National Bowling Stadium [a huge, showy building downtown that often sits empty] is a perfect example of a design-build project. The county selected a contractor, and the contractor and the county got together in cahoots with an architect, and the building wound up costing twice what it was supposed to. It's not a very useful structure unless you've got a bowling tournament. That's about all the building's good for.

#### ANY OTHER TRENDS THAT CONCERN YOU?

There is a period of architecture occurring across the country that I call "funky architecture." This style can be distinguished by its rash colors and very funny shapes. It seems in recent years design awards for many architecture projects have been for this funky architecture. When I was awarded the Nevada Silver Medal—and you cannot receive a higher award from your peers in this state—every architecture project that received an award at the program had these funny shapes. Almost the same thing happened at the last awards program in Las Vegas. In my opinion, I don't really think this is architecture. Don't get me wrong, architecture should always be interesting and thought-provoking. However, it should also respond to the function of the building, its site and environment, and be timeless. These features seem to be missing in this funky, or what probably really is "trendy" architecture.

Architects probably make a mistake by paying too much attention to Mies van der Rohe's theory of "less is more." Many buildings became too oversimplified and plain. The excitement of architecture went away, not because of that statement but because everyone seemed to practice it and there was no variety. Now we seem to have gone too far the other way. Trying to embellish everything with too much ornamentation and funky ideas just for their sake and that of the architect's own ego. We are going to look back in 10 or 15 years and be able to point to these buildings and know that they were designed in the late '90s and early '00s. We will be on to the next style.

We have gone away from the classical and neoclassical styles that are timeless. Styles such as those by Wright and Sullivan, those by the federalists, the buildings from 50, 100 and 150 years ago that we still recognize as outstanding. We seem to have forgotten Louis Sullivan's credo, "form follows function." A building's character really should be formed by what goes on within and around it, not because some architect wants to create a statement.

The funky architecture that we are now honoring may one day be seen as only to have broken the mold of the sterile architecture of the '50 and '60s. For that it is probably good. But, for architecture's sake, let's hope that we soon find a happy medium.

Elaine Marshall is a Reno-based writer and a journalism instructor at the University of Nevada.

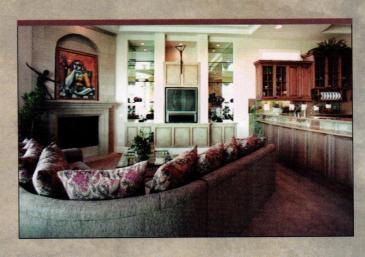
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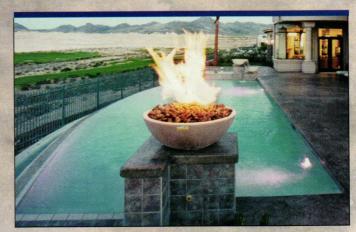
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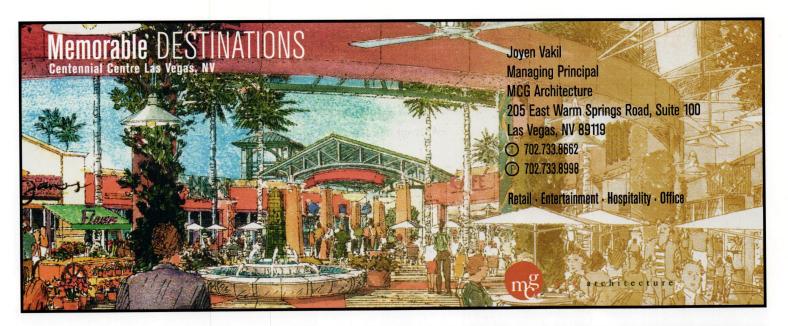
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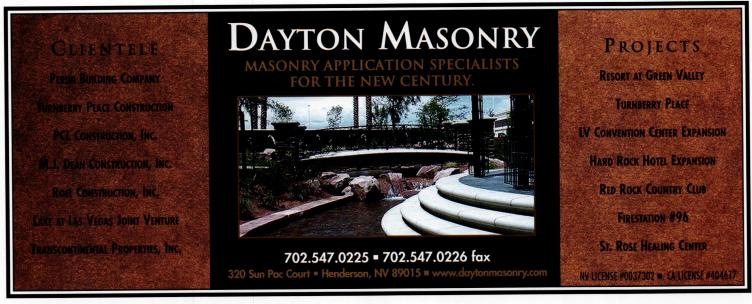
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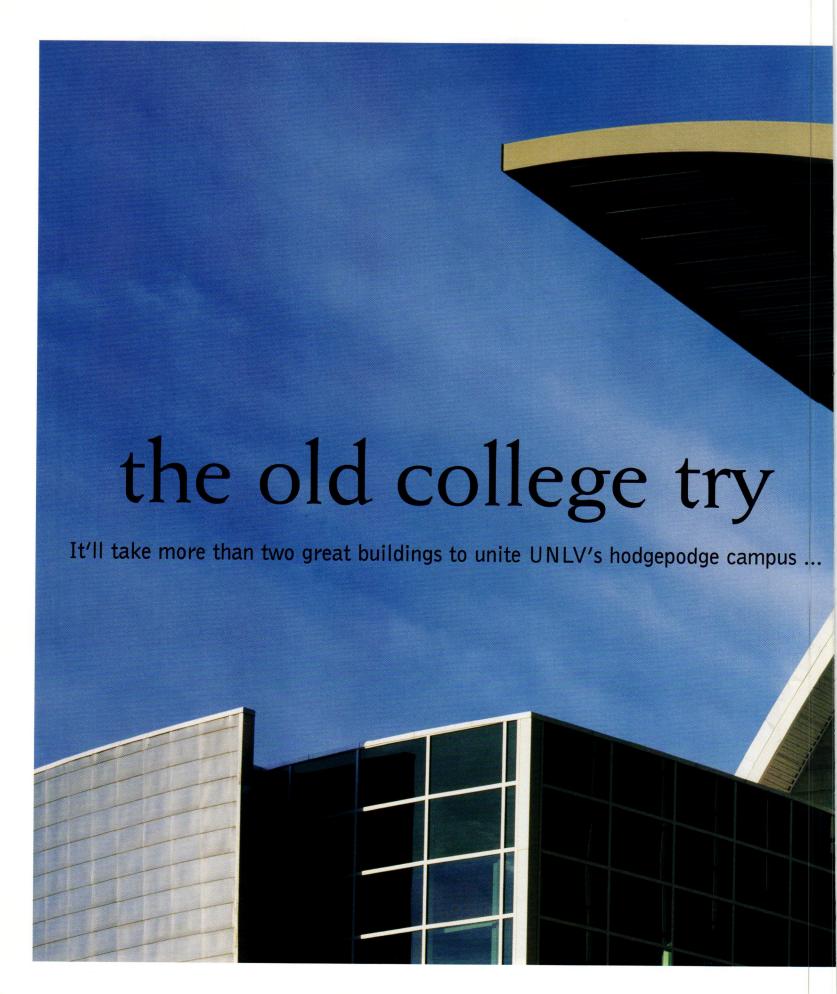
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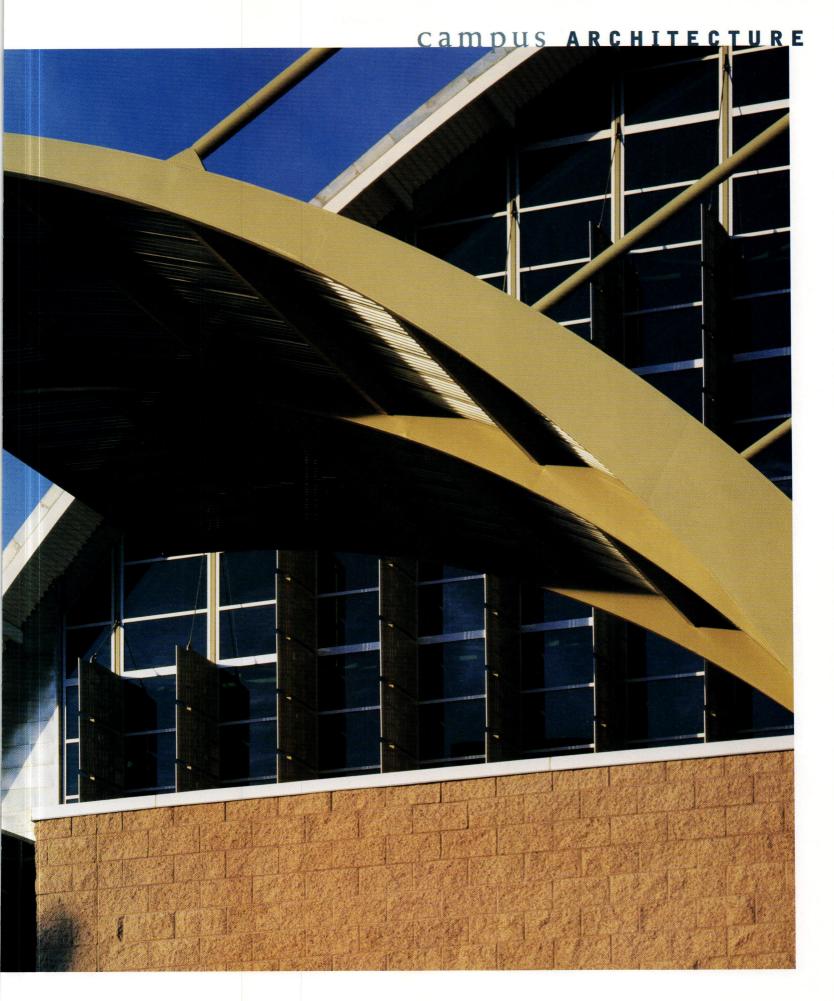
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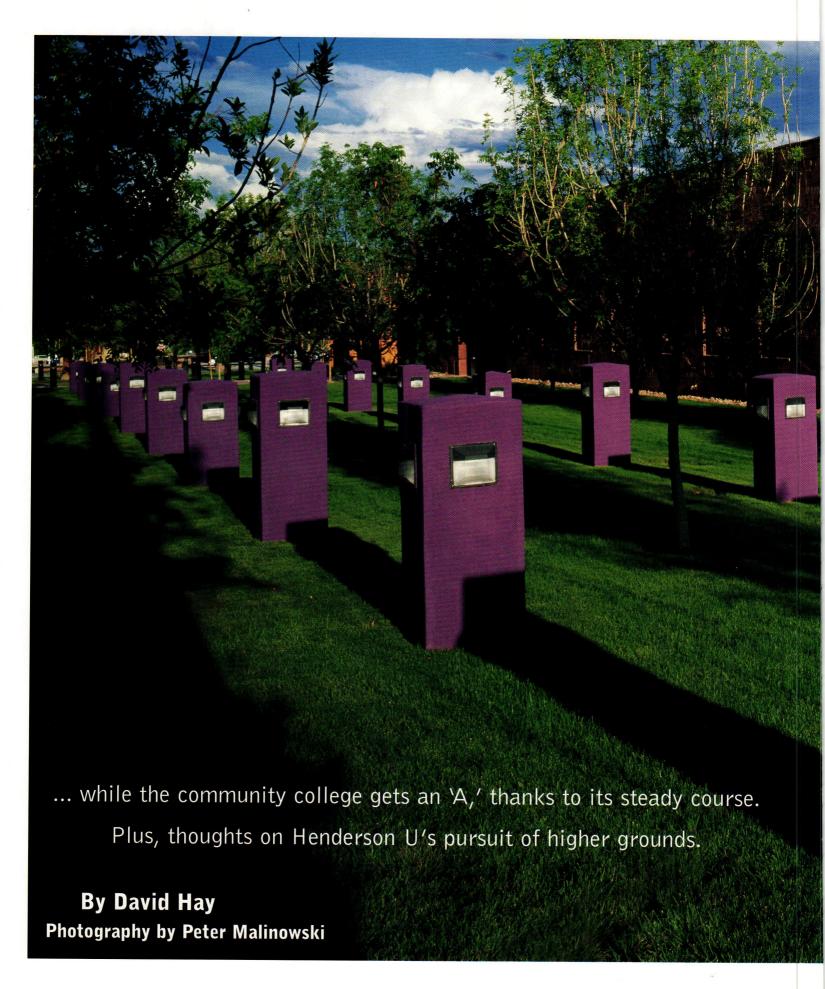
















I WAS STANDING WITH BRANDON SPRAGUE OUTSIDE THE BEAM MUSIC Center at the northeastern corner of UNLV. A principal architect with Holmes Sabatini, Sprague designed this new, \$6.3 million facility, notable for its curving, red sandstone exterior. Having toured the building, I had one last question for the 34-year-old: How could I get to my next appointment, at the School of Architecture? "You turn down Maryland Parkway, and when you get to the In-N-Out Burger, you turn right," he informed me.

"That's the entrance to the campus?" I replied incredulously.

"Yes," Sprague answered.

That a fast-food eatery would serve as one of the defining entry points to UNLV was an early indication to me that this was a campus still searching for a coherent, architectural identity. Despite an ambitious building program—and the addition of some significant new structures, such as the \$42 million Lied Library—the campus remains an unabashed mix of architectural statements.

At the south end of the mall, the Donald C. Moyer Student Union (circa 1970) is an elegant reminder of Modernism's futuristic phase. To the north on the mall are the zany orange details in the two parts of the James R. Dickinson Library. And further west there is another north-south mall (as yet unnamed) with a series of more monumental structures from the late 1980s and early '90s. This collage of architectural ideas—some realized better than others—does not distinguish UNLV from most American campuses.

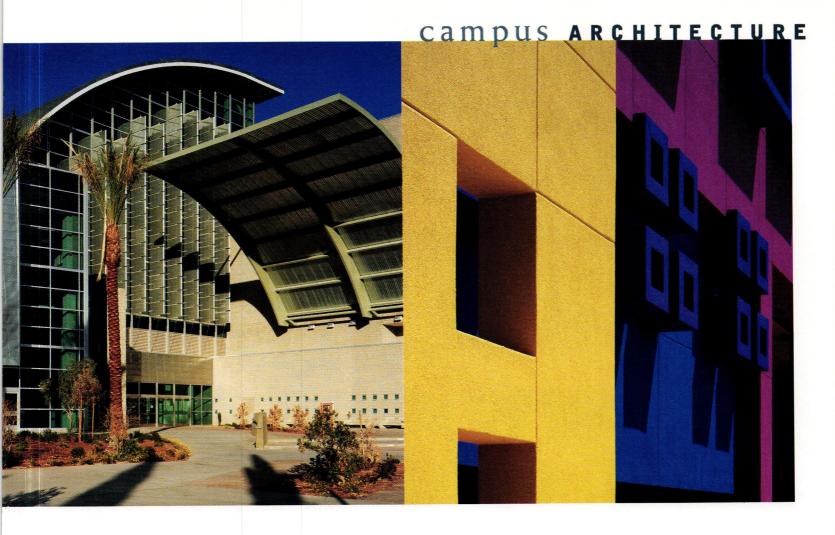
"Most colleges in this country look like a history of architecture," says Richard Dober, the author of the book *Campus Architecture* (1996, McGraw-Hill). "But

there are also some outstanding examples, such as the University of Colorado, that have successfully maintained a sense of architectural continuity."

At UNLV, lack of design continuity results from the absence of master planning and the underutilization of landscaping, a tool that often forges a sense of design unity. Eric Anderson, the former director of planning and construction at UNLV, attributes the university's inability to impose a coherent design on its campus to Las Vegas' own history with public spaces. "In a city like New York," Anderson says, "where you have restricted private spaces—small apartments and few private gardens—people insist on good public spaces. But in Las Vegas, where you have ample private space, there's much less of a desire for good public spaces."

A SUCCESSFUL CAMPUS is more than a collection of well-designed buildings, though these certainly help. A house with rooms designed by different architects, provided these rooms complement each other, could make a wonderful home. With campuses, however, what often provides a sense of community is what lies between the buildings: the public spaces where students and faculty congregate.

I thought I had found just such a space: the wide entry plaza to Welles Pugsley Architects' new Lied Library, which opens January 8. Thanks to a huge, curving, corrugated metal canopy above the entrance, shade was in abundance. The building itself is large, 302,000 square feet. But the architect's skillful mix of materials—glass, concrete brick, zinc—and the deft juxtaposition of curves and squares exemplifies how the tools of Postmodernism can lighten up what would otherwise be an imposing, almost impersonal, mass.



Unfortunately, as I left the building and looked out beyond the plaza, I was reminded where I was. In full view was the unsightly back section of a converted gymnasium, now the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Natural History. Sean Coulter, the project architect from Welles Pugsley, says the firm had been assured that a wall would be put up to shield this ugly building from view. But neither the wall nor creative landscaping serve as a soft fourth wall, leaving the exterior library plaza a less comfortable space for students.

"Landscaping offers the most effective way of pulling a campus together and also of creating gathering places that are essential to campus life," Dober writes.

But not at UNLV. "We have no master plan for landscaping," confirms Susan Hobbes, the university's campus architect. "It's something that has not been referenced in our budgets."

THE UNIVERSITY HAS TRIED more than once to design a coherent and attractive campus. Indeed, the administration has drawn up numerous master plans. Unfortunately, "the university didn't stick to my plan or any others," says Bob Fielden, principal architect at RAFI and the author of UNLV's 1993 master plan.

"When a donor came on the scene, they graciously took money regardless of

PART OF WHAT MAKES THE LIED LIBRARY (ABOVE LEFT AND OPPOSITE LEFT)
SHINE IS ITS HANDLING OF LIGHT: PLENTY OF IT GETS IN, YET ALUMINUM PANELS DEFLECT THE SUN'S DIRECT GLARE. MEANWHILE, THE KEY TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S SUCCESS LIES IN ITS COLORFUL ICONOGRAPHY.

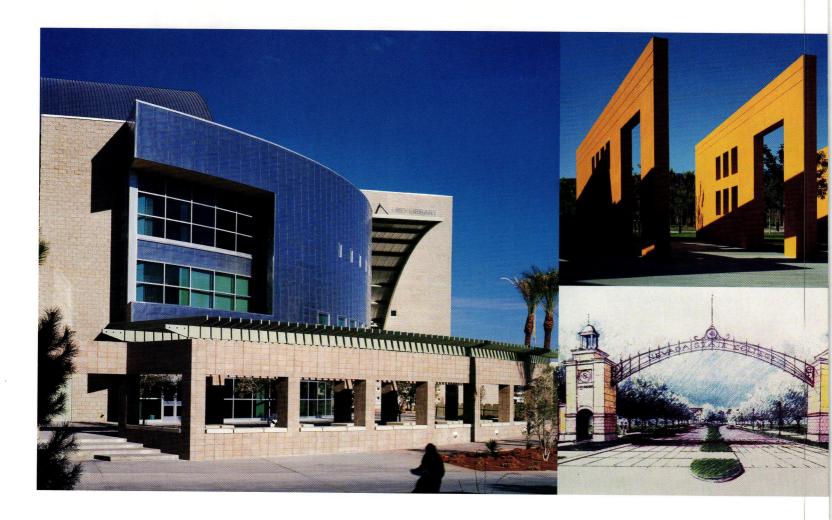
whether the building fit in with any master plan," says Anderson, now at City University of New York. "In this way, bowing to private money, the development of the campus mirrors what has happened on the Strip."

UNLV is responding more to "an academic plan catering to the needs of 35,000 students by 2010," Hobbes says, "than to any of the master plans drawn up by architects. This is a more focused plan. It has to do with whether we will be a liberal arts college or a research institution like the administration now wants us to be. And it makes sure we have the physical facilities to cater to those needs."

TWO OTHER CAMPUSES IN TOWN, the Community College of Southern Nevada's West Charleston Campus and the proposed Nevada State College at Henderson, have taken the idea of a coherently designed campus very seriously. Their responses differ markedly—the latter's still very much on the drawing board—but they testify to the fact that design can bring about the sense of community vital to any educational institution.

Thanks to the splashy colors used on its buildings, the CCSN campus, on West Charleston Boulevard, has already become part of Las Vegas' design iconography. Richard Moore, the then newly appointed head of CCSN, determined, just prior to its completion, that the fledgling campus had no strong identity. Since his daughter had done a junior high school report on Legoretto and Louis Bergon, both of whom promote the expressive use of color, Moore asked the architects to add some stark defining colors to the structures.

"The colors matched those you'd see in desert flora," says Fielden, whose firm



worked on four of the buildings. Indeed they are bright: a deep blue representing the sky, a gold that takes after the desert marigold, a fuchsia matching a cactus flower and a purple that corresponds to the color of the mountains just after sunset.

Moore's decision produced a sense of unity. The brightness of the colors is evocative of a kindergarten rather than an institute of higher learning, due in part to the application of the colors to large sections of each building rather than simple detailing. That and the small scale of this campus give it an uncanny resemblance to a contemporary shopping mall, each brightly hued structure being a fancy box store.

MOORE IS NOW PRESIDENT of Nevada State College in Henderson. To be built as part of a 290-acre multiuse development planned north of the intersection of Boulder Highway and Lake Mead Drive, the college is expected—pending the upcoming legislative session—to open its first building in fall of 2002.

Moore is emphatic that this four-year college will not only have a unified design but be modeled after early 19th-century architectural concepts promoted by Thomas Jefferson. "I want to employ his ideas by building a cluster of college buildings set around a quadrangle," Moore says. The entrance to the campus will have a Georgian-style arch. A close view of the renderings for the proposed campus shows buildings with columns and rotundas reminiscent of the Jefferson Monument in Washington, D.C.

The choice of a 19th-century architectural style is an odd one, given the desert environment where this college will be located. "It brings Las Vegas full circle," argues Anderson, the former campus architect at UNLV. "It is doing for campuses

there what the Strip has already done. It's creating a symbol rather than a real place. I call it 'campus, campus.'"

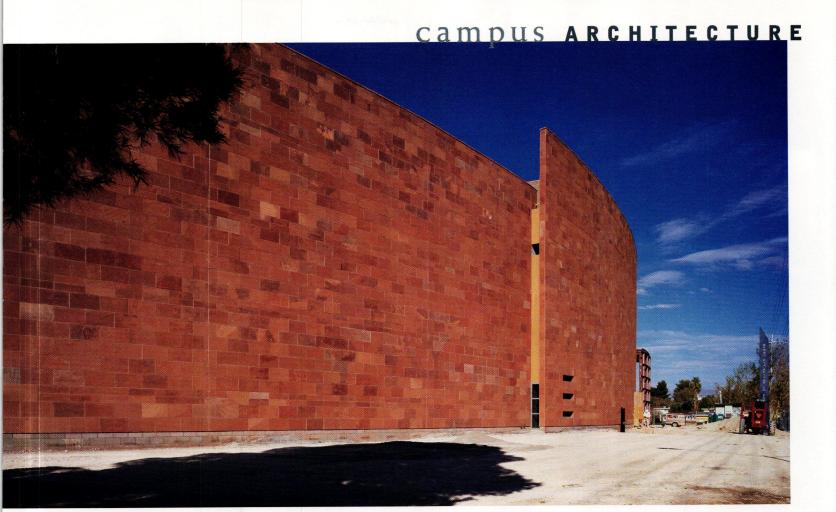
THESE SMALLER INSTITUTIONS, for the most part, have sought financing for their building programs from the state's Public Works Board. UNLV has aggressively sought more private funds. Although damaging to the university's master plans, it has led to some interesting designs, since donors are loathe to fund characterless buildings.

Some, such as Fielden, believe this type of funding has its disadvantages. "It leads to architects making statements of grandiosity rather than heeding the tenets of truly functional design," he says.

Welles Pugsley Architects might take issue with Fielden. Indeed, they are concerned that not enough money has been spent on their innovative Lied Library. They worry that the final detailing has not matched the imaginative reach of their design.

To understand what Welles Pugsley was striving for, it's necessary to spend time inside the new five-story building. This team has created an intimate and comfortably lit interior—not easy considering this is a massive structure sited in a bright

THE LIED LIBRARY (LEFT) AND THE BEAM MUSIC CENTER (RIGHT) ARE BIG STATEMENTS ON UNLV'S CHAOTIC CAMPUS. THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS ALL ABOUT COHESIVE PATTERNS (CENTER, TOP). THEN THERE'S "HENDERSON U" (CENTER, BELOW), WHOSE PLAN REMAINS A BIT SKETCHY.



desert climate. Unlike others who've simply shielded the desert sun from their interiors, opting for more controllable artificial lighting, these architects devised a series of ingenious shields to soften the harsh natural light.

Perforated aluminum panels, each 18-by-36 feet, hang off the eastern and northern faces of the building, preventing direct sunlight from flooding the inside. But mindful that during the summer months, sunlight will enter the 80-foot-high front window of the library, the firm placed perforated, stainless-steel shields between the entryway and the main floor. Even then, the ambient light, pleasant for those walking around the library, was still too great for computer users. So each of the handsome, walnut-paneled study carrels provide an even smaller shield devised to shade these desktops.

A bigger challenge was to create a feeling of intimacy. The huge glass facade and open interior would normally turn into a vast atrium. But the architects broke this up by hanging a box out into this space. Three stories high, lined with windows, this cube houses reading rooms. It's a literary version of a sky box. The light panels hanging on the north side of the building allow the architects to place large windows here. Inside they have carved some wonderful little study lofts. Here light and views are abundant, but students may study in small groups, undisturbed by the hundreds using the rest of the facility.

"It is a huge building," says Coulter, the project architect, "so we tried to break it up into small pieces."

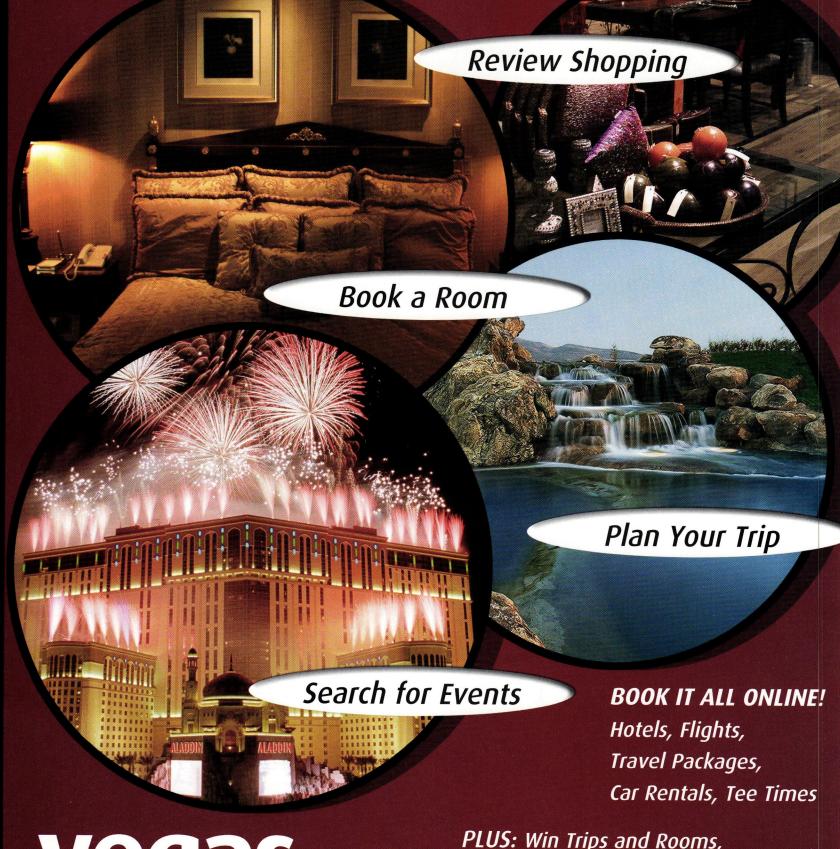
The most outlandish touches are on the mainly solid west wall, with wildly shaped windows, including one series that runs diagonally up the side of the building.

MASS WAS MORE OF A PROBLEM for the architects at Holmes Sabatini when designing the Beam Music Center. With a 300-seat recital hall, an indoor rehearsal space big enough for the UNLV marching band and a state-of-the-art recording studio, these architects didn't have the luxury of using windows to break up the boxiness of their 35,000-square-foot building. Rather, they hid these masses behind curving outer walls: a 52-foot-high sandstone wall that faces the street, and a series of smaller curving walls that lead visitors—visually and literally—into the main entrance on the building's west side.

Inside the high-ceilinged lobby, a large window looks out to the east. A gaudy furniture store across the street is hidden by deft landscaping. The raised cactus garden results in a wonderfully appropriate juxtaposition of sense and place—music being played in a desert landscape.

THE MUSIC BUILDING, as with the Lied Library, is a sophisticated design response to a specific educational need. It is unfortunate that these two buildings are on opposite sides of campus; it would be a bonus if they could inform each other. But, at UNLV, such considerations are a long way down the priority list. Thus, a long and often hot walk is necessary to view them. On the way, many other unconnected architectural styles come into view. So many that a design aficionado might be excused for forgetting that both of these wonderful designs are indeed on the same campus.

David Hay is a Los Angeles-based arts and design writer. His articles have appeared in The New York Times, dwell and Architectural Record.

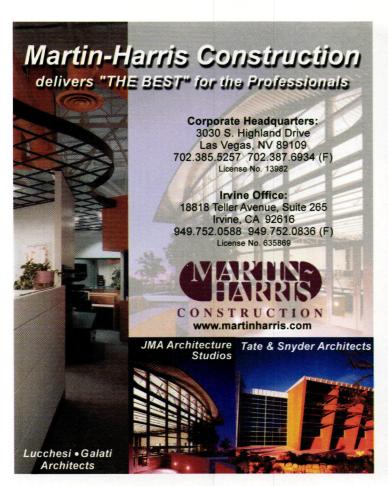


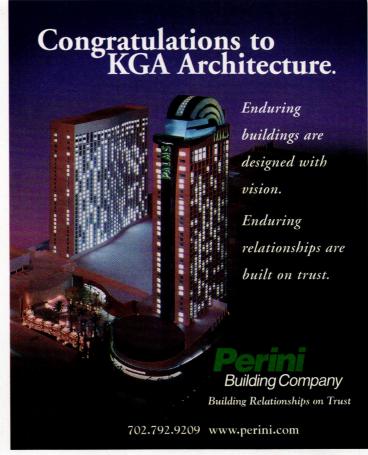
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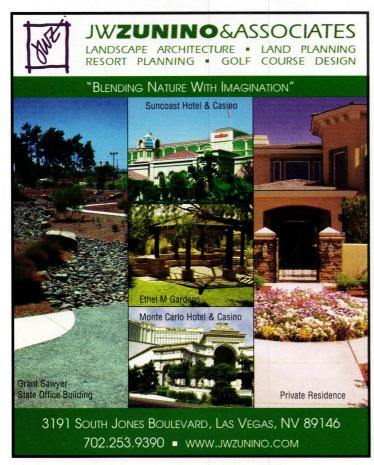
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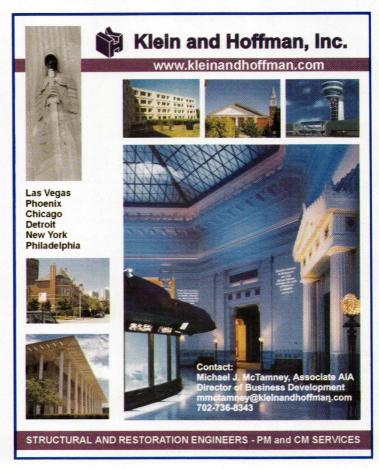
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HERE'S THE IDEA: Find five really smart people and a tape recorder and put them in a room together. Have them talk about Las Vegas, its themed architecture, its unthemed architecture and what happens when the two collide. And bribe them with a smorgasbord of food so they stay for two hours.

Turns out, the only one that didn't cooperate was the tape recorder, a medieval device from UNLV's A/V dungeon. Everybody else warmed up nicely to the roundtable idea—in some cases, heated up—and even stayed past the allotted time, on a school night, debating our city's past, present and future in a quiet corner of the university's Paul Sogg Architecture Building. So engaged were they that the pan of egg rolls was barely touched. In fact, if the fire marshall had allowed us to give Dave Hickey an ashtray, the discussion might've gone on for hours.

It would have been a shame not to share with you this enlightening blow-by-blow. So thanks to the generosity of an onlooker, who just happened to have a spare tape recorder, here now is *Architecture Las Vegas'* first of what we hope are many roundtables on one of the world's favorite architectural subjects: Las Vegas.

**Steve van Gorp:** I thought we'd start by talking about the lure of Las Vegas. What is this little desert town that's grown up into a big monster? The city's coming up on its 100th anniversary [in 2005]. What really defines Las Vegas? What began Las Vegas? What

ideas are still ingrained in Las Vegas?

Dave Hickey: It's not Utah. [Laughter] No, I'm serious. I mean that's its basic defining thing. It's 90 miles from Utah and it's not Utah, and there are Mormons who like to come down here and do bad things. [Laughter] Its primary occasion was not being Utah and being real close to it.

**Chuck Kubat:** It was about something new, a new place to go out of Utah, a new place to develop real estate related to the railroad. Today I think it continues that tradition. It's a new place to start over, you divorce yourself from somewhere and start a new family, or start a new marriage, or start a new career, or start a new business, or start a new phase of your life if you're retiring. That captures for me a lot of what the city's all about—new beginnings.

Jose Gamez: That's interesting, the idea that things can be forgotten. There is an ability to make a radical break with things that this town is very much at ease with, particularly on the Strip. From the outside, that's very much the image this city might carry forth. I'm not 100 percent convinced that everybody inside necessarily thinks like that anymore. But it does have that sort of funny frontier mentality still.

**Hickey:** Gambling is a game in which you can only bet on the future; you can't bet on the past.

**Joyce Orias:** I agree with this pioneer mentality of starting over—from personal experience. I came over



#### The Moderator

Steven Ressler van Gorp has been the urban design coordinator for the City of Las Vegas for three years, working mainly on Downtown planning and proj-

ects. Educated as an architect, the New Urbanist has spent most of his career as an urban designer and planner, housing architect and educator, including a job revamping the downtown of his hometown, St. Louis. He lives in Summerlin.



#### The Professor

Jose Gamez teaches graduate urban and architectural design at UNLV's School of Architecture. He earned his doctorate from UCLA and mas-

ter's from the University of California-Berkeley. He recently won an Honorable Mention in the Los Angeles Arts District Urban Design Competition.



#### The Designer

Joyce Orias is a project design director for Yates-Silverman Inc., an interior-design firm with three decades' experience with Vegas gaming properties.

During her five years here, her projects included New York-New York, Paris and the MGM Grand. In her hometown, Los Angeles, she was a project designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, and she was part of the opening team for EuroDisney in France. She lives in Summerlin.



#### The Developer

Chuck Kubat has been vice president of planning and design for the Howard Hughes Corporation for six years, with primary responsibility for master

planning of the Summerlin community. Before that, he served as director of design and planning for a major community developer in Houston. He spent 20 years in private practice consulting as an architect and urban designer across the country.



#### The Critic

Dave Hickey is a professor of art criticism and theory at UNLV. He has written for most major American cultural publications, from *Artforum* to

Rolling Stone, and his book Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy (Art Issues Press, 1997) is in its second printing. He was awarded the Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art or Architectural Criticism in 1994. He does not live in Summerlin.

from LA. I was displaced in the earthquake of '94. That brought me here because my specialty is themed design. The Luxor just opened up, Excalibur's been open, and they said, "Boy, we've got work for you over here." So, my first job was New York-New York, a parody of a city on its own. The idea of people coming out here ready to start something fresh is basically the theme of this town. People normally won't move here because of reputation, but when they come here, people typically stay because they realize it's a nice lifestyle here. The infrastructure is starting to support it more and more. Everything is new here. The traffic is just horrible in LA, and we're working on the traffic here, but ...

**Gamez:** Working on creating traffic here. [Laughter] **Van Gorp:** The more people that arrive the more traffic we get.

**Orias:** But it's a city, I think, of the future.

Van Gorp: Let's talk about Fremont Street. Do you think the old Fremont Street really symbolized the early Vegas? How did Fremont Street grow up, and why do you think it was there?

**Orias:** Well that was before my time, the original Fremont Street. [Laughter]

**Van Gorp:** Well, doesn't the lure of Vegas draw you here, all those images of the Cadillac convertible going down Fremont Street, don't you have those images ingrained in your head?

**Kubat:** You're talking about the image of Fremont Street before the Fremont Street Experience.

Van Gorp: That's right, the old Fremont Street.

**Kubat:** Before that it was probably just a commercial street that connected back to the train station and all that area but ...

Hickey: With card parlors.

**Kubat:** The image that you talk about is really one from the '50s and '60s and Hollywood. I remember a lot as a child ... "Let's drive down and go see all the lights." You really can't find that image anymore; it's now blown up, it's now blown apart.

**Gamez:** But that's true of just about everything in Vegas now. The Rat Pack doesn't exist anymore, the

Sands doesn't. There's a lot of nostalgia about Vegas that I think is very much still alive, but when you get here it's very difficult to locate.

**Van Gorp:** A lot of those ghosts are still there, aren't they?

**Gamez:** Yeah, they're lurking, but very difficult sometimes to locate. I think that adds to that sort of funny mystique. One of the things I think is interesting, Fremont and Vegas were nongambling entities 'til the early '30s. It's the '30s to about the '50s that that stuff begins to ...

**Hickey:** Well, theoretically it starts in the early 20th century when they legalized boxing in the state—the big Jack Johnson fight and all of that. That was sort of the core precedent for gambling in this state, when it became the only state in the union where you could carry out heavyweight fights. That's the deep tradition here because we didn't have any product except doing things ...

Gamez: That you couldn't do elsewhere.

Hickey: Right, that you couldn't do elsewhere.

Gamez: That's the one thing we still have.

Hickey: That's the basic theme, right?

**Kubat:** Not anymore, actually. That product is now pretty universally accessible.

**Gamez:** There are a few things that Nevada still holds that most places don't—some of that kind of risque lifestyle, or whatever you want to call it. There's something about being able to go somewhere and be a little bit freer than maybe you had been somewhere else. Maybe that ties back into the idea of newness, the beginning.

Van Gorp: To go to Vegas and be a little naughty for the weekend. Nobody at home's gonna know.

**Hickey:** That's not gonna happen in Philadelphia. [Laughter]

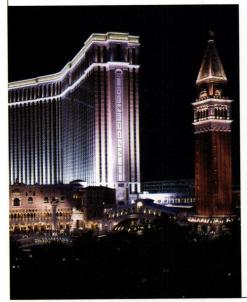
**Orias:** We're doing the remodel for Caesars Palace right now, which is controversial because there were some old venues that people for 20 years came to on their honeymoon or their yearly vacation. And they're complaining that they're not there anymore—"What's happened to this place?"

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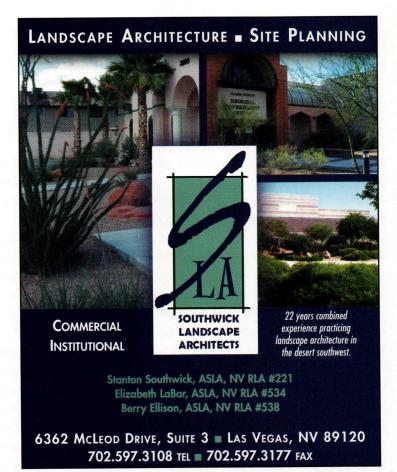
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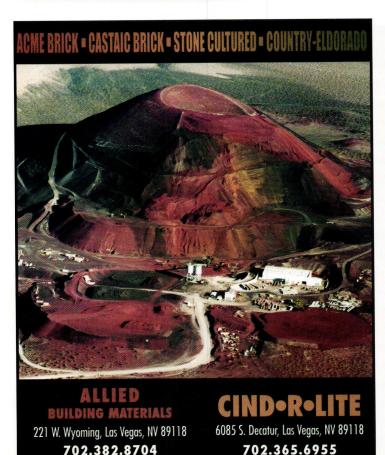
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**Hickey:** My friends are really upset about the round beds going. [Laughter]

**Van Gorp:** So those ghosts and icons are still there, aren't they? We really cling to some of those old images of what Vegas was.

Orias: I think that's part of the balance, balancing the old and the new, pleasing the old customer and also bringing something fresh for the younger customer who doesn't have that history to reference. We had a restaurant that just opened up in the old Café Roma area and is now called Café Rago. It's modern, has a view of the pool. But we've got a stage there that has the old grand piano that Frank Sinatra used to play. So there's the piano and then the plaque that says it was Frank Sinatra's piano. So that kind of thing we try to add to give people something to reminisce with. Van Gorp: What's it like to tamper with that old kind of Rat Pack image of Caesars Palace, though? You're toying with an icon.

**Orias:** That's something that's in people's heads. When you actually walk the site, you realize, "Boy, this is old." This allure is built up as a fantasy in someone's imagination. That's what marketing and theming is all about. But it's a sentiment that people carry, so it's not really inherent in the bricks and mortar.

Hickey: Caesars just grew up topsy, it's all over the place. But the things at Caesars that worked that were the consequence of this sort of vernacular proliferation are really the center of everything that has been done everywhere else. I mean, everyone goes to Caesars and thinks, "Well, OK, this worked, this kind of card room works, the interior forest works." So Caesars is kind of the vernacular artifact from which all the other casinos derived most of their design. And it's still OK in a lot of ways. It's the first place that I think you accidentally got lost in, and now they design so that you can get lost in other casinos. But in a sense, that works, because if you're lost, the theory is you can't be found.

**Van Gorp:** How do you think this whole theme thing started on the Strip? Was it Bugsy going out there on the Strip and starting the whole thing?

Gamez: The El Rancho, in '47 was it? Moving a few

feet past the city line. It changes the economics and changes the urban structure of the place, changes the social culture of the place, with one simple pocket-book-driven move.

Hickey: Also, you do have a situation here where you have 200 business establishments in exactly the same business, and the logic of distinction is going to have to express itself. I mean, the difference between one casino and another ... So theming seems perfectly natural. Gamez: There's only so much gambling that most people can tolerate. So there's got to be something else layered onto the experience. And I think in this day and age experiential economies are so bound up. Space is a commodity. It always has been. But it's very much more involved in those kinds of economies of exchange now. So, experiences are packages.

**Kubat:** It's about creating a fantasy so you have something separate to market from one establishment to another. But as a part of that, you're offering an experience, as you say, to someone who comes here on vacation. Gambling as a part of living in the desert, or living in the jungle or living in New York as a part of that experience. So you're offering that to your customers.

Hickey: New York-New York is the real exception. The basic thing about Vegas, of course, is it's founded by Mediterranean cultures. It's Italians and Jews and Armenians, and it's all this Mediterranean culture, and it is about the counterculture in America. Except for New York-New York and Paris, everything else here is about tropic latitude. So, we're not going to have the Frankfurt casino soon. [Laughter]

Orias: Well, wait a minute ... [Laughter]

**Hickey:** But what I'm saying is the iconography started off as just standard desert iconography and it proliferated like that—but only within certain latitudes.

**Kubat:** Isn't the whole idea of San Francisco as another possible casino, the same idea as New York-New York? Paris is certainly not a desert latitude.

**Hickey:** No. As I say, Paris and New York are the exceptions. That's why I think Paris is for people who haven't been to Paris. I don't think anyone who's spent much time there ever wants to go back. [Laughter]

**Gamez:** There won't be a Frankfurt, and there are probably a lot of cities that won't ever show up for the reasons you were saying. There's a whole lot of iconography that's bound up with places like Paris. Like Venice, they're memorable because of goofy nostalgia, Hollywood or romantic experiences people have had in the past. So they've got pieces of cities that can be reassembled easily. San Francisco has that.

**Hickey:** But there are genuine cultural resonances. I get on a plane here and go to Rome, and I haven't gone very far. I get on a plane and go to Minneapolis, and I have to cross the vast gulfs of dramatic difference. [Laughter] In Minneapolis you're really in a foreign country. If you're in Rome, you're in a place that's just a little less organized.

**Kubat:** That's interesting. Having been born and raised in Minneapolis, I haven't felt that exactly.

**Hickey:** I find it shocking. That's the only town I know where the people tell you how to live—as you're walking along. [Laughter]

**Gamez:** Haven't spent that much time in Texas, have you? [Laughter]

**Van Gorp:** But talk about New York-New York. I mean this is a sanitized, miniaturized New York. What's that about?

**Kubat:** Well, it's snippets, just like you said. San Francisco has the iconography, enough different things, recognizable items that you can put together in one place, and New York is that same kind of place. It lends itself to putting a lot of pieces and images together that contribute to the sense of that theme or that experience.

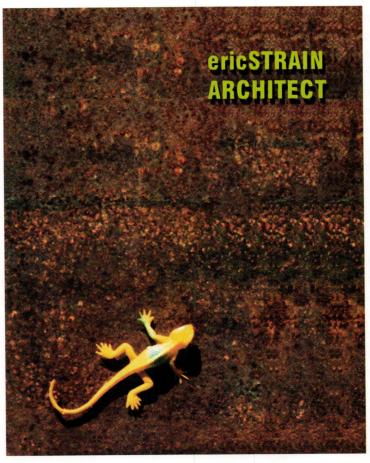
**Hickey:** The interesting thing to me about New York-New York is that visually, externally, it really is a successful building. It solves the facade problem in which you either do big windows or a lot of facades. By multiplying facades it solves the scale problem.

**Kubat:** Other than the pyramid, I thought New York-New York was actually the most successful hotel tower that I have seen in town.

**Gamez:** Because it's the only tower you occupy that's the theme piece, right?









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**Kubat:** They're all standard triangular center-core build-outs that are really pretty boring.

Van Gorp: Well, Joyce, talk about that. I mean, you're shook out of LA and suddenly you're sitting down at the drawing board in Las Vegas designing New York-New York. What was that like?

**Orias:** It was very exciting at that time because a building like that hadn't been done before. People were starting to do the Y-shape building with the center core of elevators and the three or four wings outside that, and it leaves very little for artistic expression. New York had the problem of having four towers in four different areas, and each tower had three or four clusters of pretend high-rise skyscrapers occupying that tower. So there were a lot of problems with way-finding that we tried to solve by putting in the floor pattern, having ribbons of color that ended in different elevators.

**Hickey:** And as a building I think it's interesting. I mean, all the problems on the Strip are scale problems. It's the only place in the world where they try to make buildings look smaller. New York-New York is interesting in the sense that it's clearly not a small version of New York, it's a big model of New York. As a consequence it's a lot more [effective] than it would look if it were a small New York. It looks like a big model, and that's kind of cute.

Van Gorp: Compare New York-New York to our little Egypt down the street. What's successful, what's not? Gamez: That headlight thing on top certainly works well.

**Hickey:** The Luxor's a mess for some simple reasons. First of all, Egyptian architecture is about death, it's about death in Egypt, it feels deathy, there's no roof ... I just think the iconography is very off-putting. It's not a fun thing, and it's also rather awkwardly designed.

**Van Gorp:** It is. Ride the inclinator to your crypt? **Kubat:** I don't know that the general public catches that connection with death per se.

**Gamez:** The lion's head entrance at MGM—there's a certain culture of the world that didn't feel it was lucky to walk through the lion's mouth. They quickly ripped that thing up. I think people do pick up on

these things. Maybe not everybody, but one in five.

**Hickey:** Well, the red crap tables, I mean, that's astounding. That's really not good planning. Red and green mean different things in this culture, and red means "don't" or "stop." But I think when you go in the Luxor you can see that the project was simply not carried out as it was designed.

**Gamez:** And I think the towers off to the side are afterthoughts.

**Kubat:** That's really unfortunate because it had a strong theme—which may not have been as well-designed as it could have been—but I thought it was very striking. And it was one of the first unique set pieces of architecture and hotel form on the Strip. Because of that I find it trendsetting—it set the pace for some of the things we're seeing now—Paris, the Venetian and some of the replication architecture.

**Gamez:** There's something kind of unique about placemaking based on copying, which is a strange entity unto itself on the Strip. It challenges a lot of the fundamental things we talk about in architecture classes.

**Kubat:** I don't think this city has ever really been about place-making at the same kind of civic scale or civic nature as in other places. It's about project-making and place-making as an object and as a place to make money. You get enough of those together, then what do you do with the leftover spaces in between? How do you make it possible to move from one to the other? I don't think the city or county or Valley has particularly had a lot of emphasis on ...

Hickey: This is a classically postindustrial environment. Basically Vegas has done for architecture what easel painting did for painting. When easel painting started, everybody said, "Well, how can it be real if you're moving it around from place to place? It's lost its sight." This is a postindustrial place. I mean, I think it's perfectly natural. Also, you can't make standard architectural presumptions as if these are permanent structures. They're not.

**Gamez:** Which is in keeping with a lot of other trends globally; architecture isn't about permanence.

Hickey: No, it's the opposite of that.

**Van Gorp:** So what are we doing building a giant foam Paris in postindustrial Vegas?

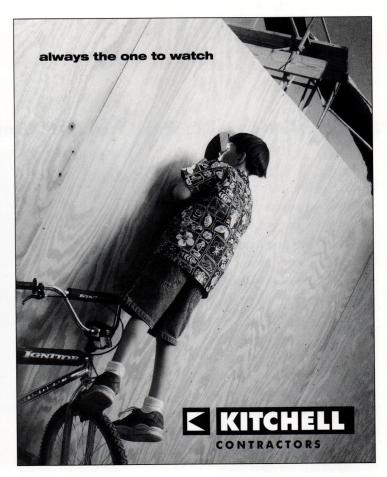
Hickey: Let me make a suggestion. I saw an interview with a business guy, Tom Peters, the other day and he was talking about historical circumstances of postindustrial culture and he said that we may be very wrong. We may in the future look down and everybody's saying, "Industrialism was the future." But maybe industrialism was the exception—150 years of regimentation, like the Dark Ages, that came and went. Maybe postindustrial culture looks more like preindustrial culture. And certainly I think it is that sense of the broader culture that makes so much modern architecture look historical. The Tate in London, for instance.

Orias: That's a really important comment to make because the Eiffel Tower was built 100 years ago and here we have a miniature—exactly half-scale. I, by the way, was responsible for the interior design of Paris, so I think I can speak a little bit about the theming on that. As we move into this new millennium, people tend to be a bit sentimental, perhaps overly, about what we had in the past, because the future is scary. ... All this retro stuff is becoming popular again because it's something that people can hang onto before they go to the next step. And we don't know what it's going bethey're talking about computer chips embedded in people's skin now. So in order for people to have something of sentiment, and as people get older and don't want to travel and don't want to walk on rickety cobblestone streets where people are rude to them, we make it happen here. And people are friendly.

Hickey: And also you come back to a sort of problem of preindustrial cities—they're all themed. Preindustrial Frankfurt's themed, Rome is themed, Athens is themed, and these are coherent architectural environments. Industrialism destroyed the visual coherence of the landscape, and then, subsequently, Modernism created the idea that there are good buildings and bad buildings.

**Van Gorp:** There's absolutely nothing coherent about the Strip. I mean, every 50 acres has a different coherence—a totally incoherent collage.







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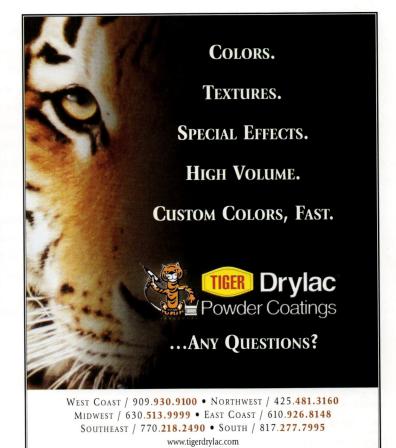
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#### "I would rather look like Korea Town than Minneapolis or Philadelphia, God help us." Dave Hickey

**Hickey:** I think it is. I tend to regard it as a perfect manifestation of premodern American architecture. It has the whole iconography, the whole mixed iconography that they taught at Columbia in 1905.

**Orias:** I think it is also a product of the video age. You used to move at the horse's pace, so you move across a city and everything is kind of in the same space, because that's as far as you traveled. Now we travel at light speed. We turn the TV on, we've got movies, we've got things that change every half city block.

**Van Gorp:** How does the architecture respond to that?

**Orias:** I think Las Vegas responds quite well because a lot of the reasons we have such varied theming is that people have shorter attention spans. They've got the attention span of an MTV video.

**Van Gorp:** You're designing buildings for the MTV generation?

**Orias:** I think you have to be challenged by keeping things exciting ...

**Gamez:** We're in the era of a very sophisticated image culture, a culture that has the ability to process and absorb a multitude of information kind of quickly and can decipher what they want out of it. And architecture is going to have to respond to that. I think "commercial vernacular" is where I kind of lump the casinos. And, frankly, what we have in this landscape are two versions of commercial vernaculars, the sort of residential stuff which happens on a huge scale of 10,000 units at a time, and the megaresort thing. We don't have traditional high architecture. We've got stuff we can talk about architecturally, but the categories are having to bend.

**Hickey:** Commercial architecture has very, very different rules and a different tradition. It goes back to the souk. I mean it's not a fort, it's a souk—it doesn't have walls, it's got a ceiling and a floor.

**Gamez:** And it has to respond in a competitive market. It has to be loud, it has to have itself out there, it has to grab a customer in a way that buildings in the past didn't have to because they were designed behind



regimens of power. Rome is coherent, it's themed, it's Napoleon or Caesar or Franco. It's any major figure who had the authority to actually build a city. We don't have a situation, particularly in Las Vegas, in which you have a coherent structure of power that can build cities. You can build parts of cities.

**Hickey:** Well, you have basically a dialectical struggle. And the interesting thing about living here is the radical fracturing of the public and private sector. It's so theatrical. It would be funny if it weren't so functional.

**Orias:** If you actually look at the function of these casinos, each one literally is a city unto itself.

**Hickey:** They're little city-states, little Italian city-states.

**Van Gorp:** They're extremely diagrammed. I mean, if you're mindful of it, you feel like you're being completely manipulated by all those processes. The way you're processed through spaces, the theme, the sounds, the smell.

**Gamez:** The degree to which you buy into Disney's main street.

**Hickey:** At the same time I think Americans are a little more sophisticated than to suspect themselves of being manipulated like that.

**Van Gorp:** Isn't Vegas about manipulating people, turning them upside down and shaking every nickel out of their pockets and sending them back home?

Orias: I think that people have to take responsibility for

their own selves as well. They go into a structure knowing they're going in there to gamble and they're going in there to try to beat the house, and if they don't beat the house at least be entertained while they're losing. So we try to create an environment for them that they're entertained in, not necessarily to keep them involved—that's the gaming consultant's job, to keep the slots moving and to keep them exciting. But our job as architects and designers is to keep people happy where they are, keep them comfortable, keep them warm, keep them safe, keep them entertained, so there's always some detail they can look at and be excited about and come back for more. So it's really not so much about manipulation; it's really more about entertainment.

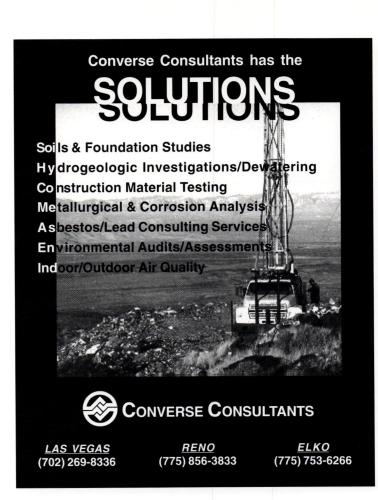
**Hickey:** Your numbers may be better than mine, but I hear that 85 percent of people in a casino every day don't gamble. That means 15 percent of the people that go into the casino gamble. A lot of people go into a lot of casinos, of course. But in my experience that sounds about right.

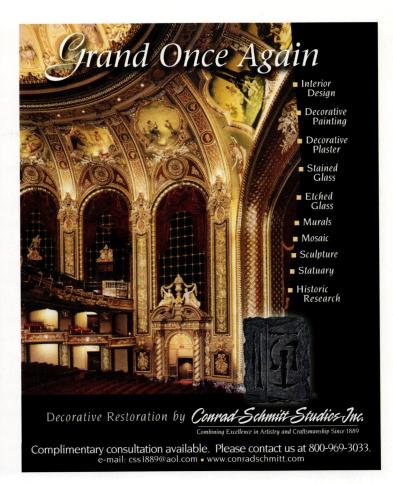
**Gamez:** Quite a few of the casinos now are structured in a way as to not rely totally on gaming-related profits. So it's entertainment, it's restaurants, it's commodities, shopping ...

Orias: It's also coming at a female, which I'm all up for. For the longest time, bathrooms were just bathrooms, now they're themed environments, and for me that's a big plus. I like being in a nice, beautiful, clean bathroom, and New York-New York's was kind of a first in having each bathroom be different, and then Paris took it even more. We've got pedestal-surrounded sinks from Europe. We get calls all the time saying, "We'd like this for our house. Can you tell us where you got that?" And that, to us, is a very successful thing, when people want to emulate something in their own home. That's how comfortable they feel.

**Van Gorp:** But the Strip's been completely sanitized, hasn't it? I mean when Bugsy opened his casino, gambling was about gambling. Now gambling is about entertainment; it's not gambling anymore, it's gaming.

Kubat: Back then it was an opportunity to do some-







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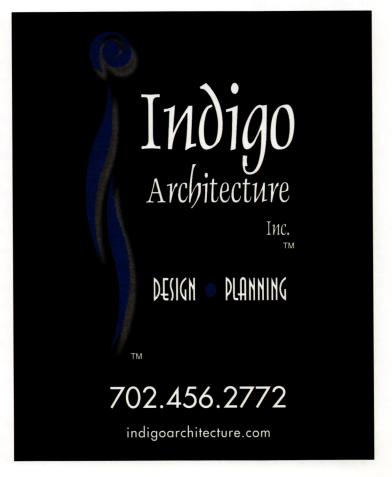
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thing different, to come here from California for a certain set of people and do something very different and naughty and dress up and get entertainment in a different way. I would suspect that gambling wasn't the only reason that people came.

Hickey: I do think there are little sequences in urban fashion. The lower end of the Strip is certainly a little fashion for Reagan-ite MBAs from Wharton School of Business who thought they were going to make family environments, and it actually did help the off-season. Now the bottom of the Strip is for summer and the rest is for the season. But it was a disaster, and I think the next little phase is this sort of Minneapolisization, Guilliani-ization of American cities, in which we tidy everything up and make everybody walk on the sidewalk. But that's probably as transient as the family values movement at the bottom of the Strip.

Van Gorp: Well, we've sanitized our casinos, too. I mean, there's no nudie bar in Times Square of New York-New York, there's no little whorehouse around the corner.

**Gamez:** There's no nudie bar in Times Square anymore. This is where it gets dangerous: The sanitation and sort of family values version of Vegas works so well that people go home and say, "Why can't we clean up Times Square and make this kind of a commodified version?"

Hickey: Some guy at the Mirage told me, "Let's just face it, it's easier to make one millionaire from Taiwan happy than 10 rednecks in a camper, and you know who's going to gamble." I think there's an economic common sense to that, but at the same time, there wasn't much for people to do on the way from Disneyland to the Grand Canyon in the summer—you know, those German people in their short pants. And so it's nice that there's Excalibur and all that now. [Laughter]

**Van Gorp:** So, what's next? Steve Wynn says theming is over. So where are we going next with all this? Where's the Strip going?

 $\label{eq:Hickey: I would say that, stylistically, if I were doing something right now I would open a retro neon casino. \\$ 

Gamez: Do a Las Vegas-Las Vegas.

**Van Gorp:** Hey, Vegas-Vegas is mine. I'm going to sell that idea and retire.

**Hickey:** That would be my instinct, though, to go back

and do a retro neon Liberace casino. That's where the logic is. Adults have money; children don't have money. **Gamez:** I guess there are two possible simultaneous directions. One is to figure out the next great theme that helps regenerate the next cycle (and there's probably a lull in between now and then). And the other direction seems to be to turn the Strip into main street, put the big civic institutions on main street, put the Guggenheim on main street, put Wal-Mart on main street. Putting Wal-Mart on the Strip might actually work for some people who do not think about that area as the core of where we live. It acts as a division and certainly a lot of people work there, a lot of people go to certain places for dinner and shows, but it doesn't properly act as a main street, though.

Hickey: I would suggest to you that there are tremendous virtues to having a city without a center and there are tremendous virtues to having a society without a community. To be honest, nobody ever said the word "community" to me and then gave me permission to do something. I mean, it is a word that is almost inevitably used to control people and to restrict their behavior, and I've never heard it used in a positive sense, ever. And so fantasies of community seem to be just part of our nostalgia for the farm or for the small town. In my experience, I've lived in a small town; I don't want to go back there.

Van Gorp: So we're not gonna have Iowa the Casino. Hickey: Well, no. We could set up a situation where everyone could go through their neighbor's garbage and it would make them feel at home. [Laughter]

Van Gorp: It seems like theming is invading our lives now. I can't even go out to dinner without having to go to a themed restaurant, even out in the suburbs now. Why is theming invading all of our regular architecture as well?

**Hickey:** Well, because we don't have the culture here, and we're not supposed to—this is an economic society. There's no cultural continuity, there's no ethnic

continuity, there's no climatic continuity—it's an economic society. We're a lot of different people, and I like it better than what we had before.

**Gamez:** I think the structure of the economy is such that there's got to be a theme just about anywhere you go. The idea of newness, the idea of uniqueness, the idea of providing experiences lends itself to creating packages in a certain way. In our global capitalist society, we've got large commercial vernaculars, and they compete head to head, for better or worse.

**Hickey:** And I think you have to admit that democratic societies, going back to the Roman Republic, are inherently theatrical. The idea is that we behave in public in a way that expresses the values we have. So it is a theater of public life, it's not like some sort of private Protestant devotion. It is an externalized culture by its nature because we don't have anything inside in common.

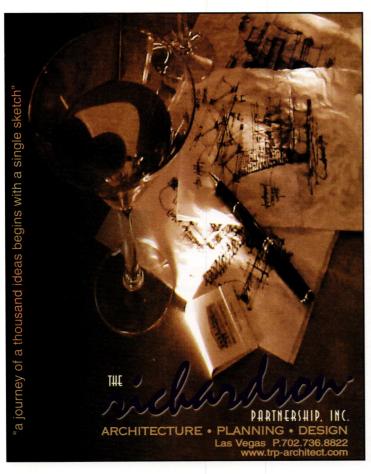
**Van Gorp:** If we're building smoke and mirrors all the time, is it real architecture? Are we ever going to achieve a real architecture here in Vegas?

Hickey: What is real architecture?

Orias: That's exactly what I was going to ask.

Gamez: I think if you talk to [architectural historian] Vincent Scully, he'd say "no." I think what we have to begin to do is expand, bend our little definitions here a little bit to figure out what this stuff is. Because the more I try to teach things, the more I've come to the realization that we have very little of what we traditionally understand as architecture. What we do have is this funny postindustrial fragmented landscape that gets dominated by private interests, individual expressions and individual experiences. They're not collective experiences. We don't even have a clear understanding of the public realm anymore or what constitutes it, where it belongs ...

**Hickey:** Well, our idea of the citizenry comes out of the idea of collective identity that's an industrial fantasy. You know, it's like people are really different, and the more different a postindustrial culture becomes the more distinct they're going to become. ... I don't know any normal people anymore.

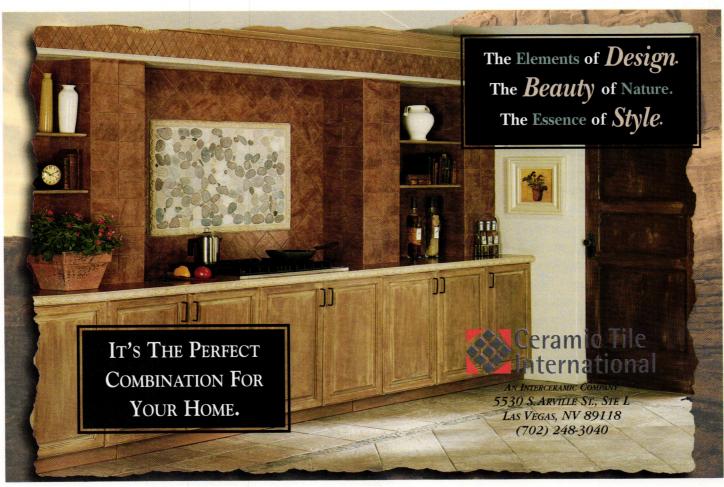




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**Gamez:** Steve, you know you and I talk quite often and sit on slightly different urban fences, I'd say. And I respect quite a bit of what's behind the rhetoric of New Urbanism, that we should have pedestrianfriendly places, there should be certain kinds of coherent pieces, and so forth, but I have a lot of problems with the models from which that stuff springs. You know, it comes from older models such as the urban fabric found along major East Coast cities or like the area of Boston shaped around a park space.

Van Gorp: And Classicism.

**Gamez:** It doesn't resonate with my cultural background—I have a hard time fitting. I feel very at home in LA and it's nothing but a mess. But I love LA, and my hope is that Vegas will become more messy and ingrown and overlaid in the way that LA is. Then the Strip is like Wilshire, it runs all the way through but it's like going through five different cities. That would be great. And it should be allowed to do that. There is a certain amount of maybe strong-handed planning we should enforce so we can come back in and fill in a few of these empty pockets so that we get a greater kind of funny diversity inside. But we should just kind of let it sprawl a little bit more to a point, within reason.

Hickey: The funniest thing that I've noticed here is the thrust to Midwesternize Vegas is so enormous. Maybe it comes from Jan [Jones], I don't know. But I was on a committee and they were talking about putting in a performing arts center Downtown. They wanted to put up a theater so we could have musical comedies. At that time there were only three musical comedies running on the Strip, and there was a Minneapolis architect there with me, and I said, "OK, this is Las Vegas, why don't we have an opera house? This is the one thing that would be the natural extension of this culture that we could do world-class, that we could fill up every night, that every goombah in town would be there with his grandmother in the vile dress. It would be a wonderful social experience ..." Silence. We want people to come in from the suburbs and experience No No Nanette. And so what I'm saying is, the idea of embracing what, in fact, Vegas is, which is the only town in the

world where I don't know where the Episcopal church is ... There seems to be a lot of resistance to that, and I find it fairly mysterious. I agree with you, I would rather look like Korea Town than Minneapolis or Philadelphia, God help us.

Kubat: There are several different environments obviously around here, and living environments may be different from some of our commercial environments, specifically different from our themed Strip environment. And I find the Strip a fascinating place. I think it is architecture, it's not architecture in the same definition as in some other places. It's not being designed to necessarily the same rules and some of the same expression, but there's terrific expression of architecture. It's a little bit like originally Morris Lapidas being defamed for what he was doing, creating environments in Miami Beach—and after the fact he was a terrific influence on a whole period of architecture. Hickey: Well, Morris invented public American space. I mean, he invented the American store.

**Kubat:** So I think that it is architecture, but I don't think it's necessarily something that everybody wants around them at all times; and therefore we have this little split, a kind of dichotomy of "we put it here, we welcome it, it's our economic engine, we go to it," but when we go home, for a lot of people, they want to be as far away from it as they can.

**Gamez:** But then we go and we put the slot machines in our Vons and we buy up into Summerlin, the ultimate themed environment, villages and pseudo public spaces. I mean, look at the newspaper print ads; Summerlin is entirely about package, about image, about theme, about a particular image of what it means to have a home.

**Hickey:** Sort of Sammy Davis Jr., Italian kind of ambience. If there's a shame in Las Vegas it's in Green Valley. That and in Summerlin. That is one of the great architectural travesties. I mean, if you look at the history of modern architecture, you have to understand Edison invented the electric light a long time ago, and modern architecture has yet to come to terms with it. You know what I mean? And air condi-

tioning and the electric light and all of this, and we're sitting there looking at the library at Cornell as our ideal. I think just because Vegas architecture integrates such recent invention as the light bulb, it really doesn't distinguish it from the history of Western architecture. Or just because modern architect Colin Rowe doesn't like lights doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with it.

Gamez: And this might be the one thing besides this idea that Vegas is constantly new and can blow up some building and a couple years later something bigger and better will be there; and a few years later it'll blow up and rekindle the cycle, not unlike the Roman Catholic Church used to do, knocking down churches and building right back on top. ... The cycle is a lot longer now. There's a question of scales and speed and time frames that we were mentioning earlier. But the whole idea that we want to have the Strip sort of "over there," but that we want to go home away from it. ... I think there's an inherent contradiction in just about everything that we build in this landscape, and it's all tied back to some idea of a package, of a commodity. And marketing in this town is about as good as it gets, regardless of what anybody says. They're selling 10,000 units of houses-I don't know how often, a month or a day—because there's something about the package, about Vegas, that they want to buy into, whether it's the condo apartment type, whether vacationing or whether it's buying the American dream in the suburbs of Vegas. And somehow the theme of Summerlin distinguishes it from Vegas, which is the whole premise behind Green Valley: We're not Vegas.

Kubat: It is different. On one level it is, and yet some of the biggest dilemmas out of that have been exactly that, when we have the Regent at Summerlin or some other [place] that brings gaming out into that environment, there's a lot of people that are upset because it is invading the concept of the separation. And, on the other hand, to provide services, to provide restaurants to provide jobs, to provide hotel rooms in a broader community—in this town it comes from gam-



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# "Architects in this Valley could do a better job in trying to help the development community figure out what's the right architectural expression for this kind of environment." Charles Kubat

ing—whether that's the intent or the byproduct. It seems like the same with the grocery stores and with everything else. The few machines in a grocery store take care of all the overhead of that grocery store basically on a yearly, monthly basis, and so why not—if they can do it, why not? We're going to have gaming in anything that's legal to put it in.

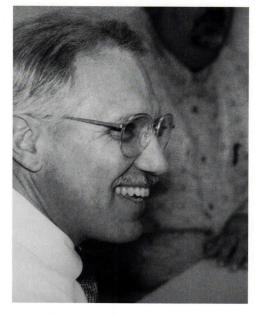
Van Gorp: Let's wrap up our suburban postindustrial conversation. In the middle of a magnesium swamp in Henderson, we're about to build a Georgian-revival Henderson State College. What in the world is that about? Why do we need a themed college?

Hickey: I went to a themed college, at SMU. It was the perfect Georgian version of the University of Virginia. I don't think that's critical, they can do anything they want to, by my book. I think it's silly. Theming is not really the issue in a university; it's signage. No, what I'm saying is universities are prohibitive environments because you can't look at the building and see what the hell it is. I can't. You design universities to keep alien people off of it, and that's what it's for, so you can look at it and it doesn't say "Business Building" in neon, it says "George Bloom Building," very small, and you either have to know that or find an English-speaking student.

**Kubat:** One way to add credibility to whatever it is, is you give it an image of someplace else, and especially someplace of some reverence or some other place of higher learning that you are emulating. So that's really what it's about; it's establishing sort of an instant credibility to the extent that you can.

**Gamez:** If it's got some ivy, it's old and it's solid and stable. That's the funny thing about this place; nostalgia is so pervasive in contemporary society—and, in certain ways, particularly here—that it tends to drive everything you want. But you don't want it old, you want it new with the new-carpet smell and everything, but it's got to look like it lives in the world of old things so it can carry that same kind of clout.

**Hickey:** You do have a situation here in the public sector and the academic sector where these are the main people in town who are not here because they



want to be here. They're here because they got a job here. I moved here because I like Las Vegas, but I have no colleagues that did—hardly anyone at the university itself that did. Everybody came here because they got a job here. They don't like Las Vegas; they wish it were Bloomington, Indiana; they wish it were Austin, Texas. And so, as a consequence, you've got a real kind of suburban bourgeois core of thinking in the public sector and in the academic sector that cannot imagine why anyone would want to live in Vegas except for tenure and benefits and things like that.

**Van Gorp:** So it's all us assholes who have moved here screwing up the place. So what should Vegas be then?

Hickey: I don't care what it is. I mean, I like it the way it is. What I'm saying is that one of the nice things about Las Vegas is, in general, that it's like the beach. I have a place in Ocean Beach down in San Diego. It doesn't matter how poor you are, you wake up in Ocean Beach and you say, "Whoa! I'm at the beach, I'm not in Salt Lake City." And a lot of people here wake up here in Vegas and say, "Oh, thank God, I'm not in Ithaca anymore." But there's a public servant sector here which is not driven by desire, but by security and things like that, that simply does not have access to that whole world of value. A lot of Americans go where

they want to go, and then get a job, and so the city, as I say,  $\dots$  the theatrical schism between the public and private sector is more theatrical here than any place I've ever lived. There's no connection whatsoever.

**Van Gorp:** What is this great architectural stage called Summerlin then?

Kubat: I never called it a great architectural stage.

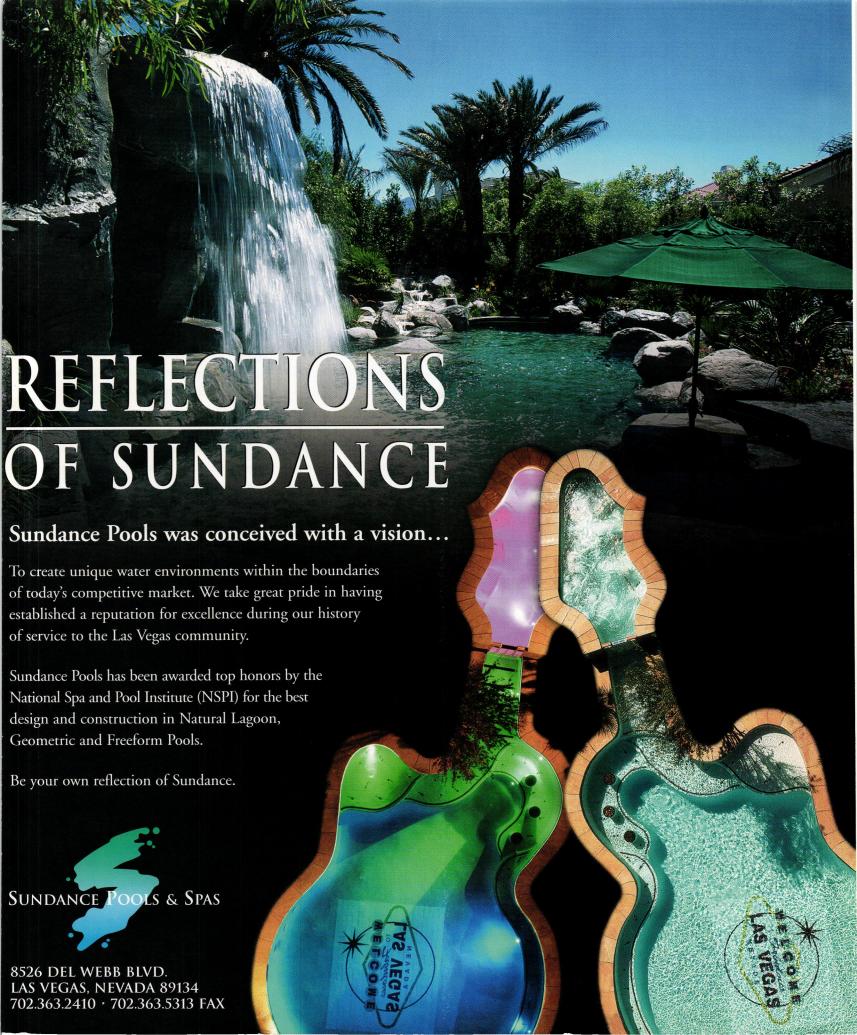
Van Gorp: No, I just did.

Kubat: I listened with interest to your comments about community and the false idea of community, and I guess that really is in the perception of each individual. I think that that's a perfectly valid perception if that's what you're looking for, that's where your life is or whatever. But there's a whole lot of population that may have a different perception. What we aspire to is to create through references and through the kind of environments that we provide, as well as the activities and the organization and so on, an opportunity to come to a new place and find elements of a lot of different, very disparate groups of people, find elements of things that in fact do provide community for them—that provide common experiences, that provide a certain amount of safety, that provide some things that they're familiar with, some green trees and some grass—things done in a responsible way relative to the desert. That's a lot of what Summerlin's success has been; it's found a way to create a variety of environments that people have voted with their feet that they like to be around. They like the environment that it's created. They like the kind of settings that have enabled them to meet other people and so on. Now, it's not for everybody.

**Gamez:** As a marketing structure, it's LA in the 1920s, right?

Hickey: It's LA without black people.

**Gamez:** Yeah, and with gates. I mean, contractors and developers were doing this kind of thing years ago where you bought a house out of five catalog choices and it looked kind of like this and everybody's kind of like that. Again it's a question of scale, partly, you built 20 houses as opposed to 10,000 at a time. But image and nostalgia remained important because everyone coming from the Midwest or the East was part and par-



cel of the whole project in building most of Los Angeles. So it's not particularly new, and it's a fairly well-proven marketing strategy that works to sell a product. The danger is that you begin to create a prepackaged sense of community—that community doesn't evolve organically, be it a dangerous version of community or not, however we want to think about it. But the idea that you can't pull your engine block in your front yard in Summerlin, the idea that you can't paint your house any color you want in Summerlin, these are things that begin, when you start to talk about the notion of community, to actually infringe upon individual rights in many ways, at least in my opinion. I wouldn't be able to live there because I couldn't freely express my own personal voice. So I choose not to live there, but a lot of people don't have that choice.

**Kubat:** It's interesting. It does infringe upon certain rights, but people have willingly given up certain rights to get other things in terms ...

Gamez: I think that's inherently dangerous.

**Kubat:** ... In terms of the type of neighborhood they have, or what they want in the investment, long-term investment in their house. The interesting thing here is, people have chosen to do that; no one's forced them to come to Summerlin versus someplace else, because there's a lot of other housing choices around the community where you don't have to do that.

**Gamez:** There aren't many, actually. I'm a fairly recent newcomer to this town, me and my wife, and there are a couple of neighborhoods in which there's some older housing stock that doesn't have gates. There are a couple of neighborhoods that don't feel a little bit unsafe.

Hickey: This is the safest city I've ever lived in.

**Gamez:** And there's a real perception of fear particularly from people in Summerlin, where my wife works, who'll say, "You bought where? You live where? Oh my God, that's the ghetto!" But if you come into my neighborhood ... it's the friendliest place I've ever been. It's exactly the opposite.

**Hickey:** I agree. This is the friendliest town I've ever lived in.

**Gamez:** But I think there's a real danger, and I don't necessarily share your definition or your understanding of community. I think community can be used in very positive ways. But this is an example where there's a very thin line you have to walk, and to produce it at the scales at which it gets produced begins to tip the balance in a way that I can't frankly agree with.

Hickey: Community is not about inclusion; community is about exclusion, by definition—people in the community, people out of the community. If there were no people out of the community, you wouldn't need to call it community. W.H. Auden said if there are people at a table and three people are having steak and one is eating chicken, you don't have a mixed community, you have two communities, period. So I don't know about the walls and the gates. It works OK in Mexico City. You need better weapons—and it seems to be going in that direction. Where I was down there, it's really great—they got great weapons, glass on the walls ...

**Orias:** In defense of Summerlin, I live there. I chose that area because it was convenient. They took village concepts that were proven over time to be very convenient for people.

Kubat: Summerlin may represent positives to a lot of people; it may represent some negatives to people. It's got a lot of positives, from my point of view, obviously. ... A lot of pretty miserable choices are out there, and a lot of pretty miserable environments are being created even as we speak [based on] the process of both land assembly, the lowest common denominator for what you need to build, and the level of demand from the public sector about what someone must do. On one hand, it provides affordable housing to some degree, but at the same time I'm concerned about what kind of environment it ultimately leaves us with. What kind of a legacy does it leave us with? It is the same kind of legacy potentially that we had with some of the earliest housing here, that has not maintained itself well over time, and is in fact throwaway. It's sad that I think we're building in obsolescence in a lot of those areas.

**Gamez:** The fundamental problem with any kind of consumer industry, architecture and real estate now

bound up in that, is that it has to constantly be new, it has to constantly sell itself, which means it has to constantly reinvent itself, which means something is going to fall out of fashion, something's going to fall out of favor, something's gonna have to get disposed of. We are not a culture that invests long haul in many things, and our urban landscape in some ways reflects that. So how does it mature?

**Hickey:** I think in the end, one of the interesting things about Vegas is that there's nothing built into the system that allows it to mature, because the process of communities maturing has to do with the establishment of social institutions that bridge the public and the private with country clubs, athletic clubs—this whole thing where the mayor and the business people all hang out together. And this is not going to happen here.

Van Gorp: No society, no community?

**Hickey:** No, it's got a society; it just doesn't have a community. I mean, it's not gonna happen here. We don't have a white Protestant upper-middle class like the rest of America.

Gamez: But we're gaining that.

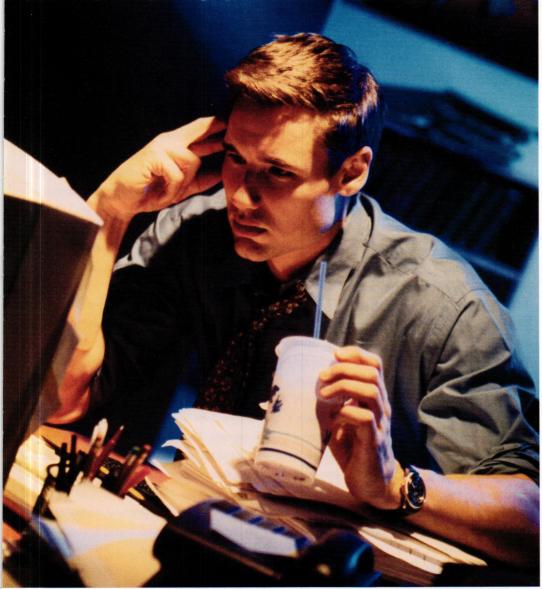
Hickey: I hope not.

**Kubat:** I'm not sure that I agree. Maybe that's the way it is now and that's the way it's been, but I think it's evolving. More people are coming here from a variety of places that are looking for—at least a certain percentage of them are looking for—some of things that you just said were not here.

**Hickey:** I agree with you. That means, what they basically want is the privilege of no state income tax and Minneapolis. And so that's what they want, but that's not necessarily a good way to run a city.

**Kubat:** I think it is a good way to run a city in the sense that you've got some choices and, again, there's some variety. There's a whole group of folks who live here in Las Vegas that want it to be absolutely the way it was or want it to be "no rules." In fact, there's a lot of diverse kinds of people who can live here, and I don't think it's bad that there's a certain percentage of people that want to institute some new institutions and some new culture.

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**Gamez:** That's not necessarily a bad thing, as you say, and certainly this is a place that should be able to absorb a diverse network of people.

Kubat: It's accepting of a lot of things.

**Hickey:** If you look at the long-term development of urban life in America, I think you have to remember that Vegas is not an unusual place. Vegas is the '70s. America has been puritanized since the '70s. Vegas is not. Vegas is just like Fort Worth was. Vegas is just like Kansas City was. Vegas is just a normal American city that hasn't had the hegemony of Northeastern-liberal-urban-planning-alleviation-of-anxiety-happy-open-spaces imposed on them.

Van Gorp: Well, I'm working on that Downtown right now, though. [Laughter]

**Hickey:** But what he's saying is, Vegas is not really the beginning of anything in a sense, it's the last of something about America that doesn't exist anywhere else, except maybe in Miami and New Orleans.

**Gamez:** The question is whether or not it can withstand an onslaught ...

**Hickey:** I don't think it can. Ultimately, the federal government will tax gaming and it'll just disappear.

Van Gorp: So Vegas will burn itself out?

Hickey: Well, no, the government will come in and try to take money from gaming. It'll change the odds, the games will change, it'll be over. It's what happened in most big gaming cities in America. Eventually the money looks too fat for the people. You know, you have this classic thing, the puritans from the Midwest hate gaming; the Northeastern liberals who don't mind gaming want the money for their public projects. They get together, they tax gaming, it's over. The odds are the odds, that is a statistical thing. And so I don't think you can run a big gaming industry with the house taking an additional seven percent.

**Van Gorp:** Does anyone have a a more rosy, optimistic view for Vegas? [Laughter]

**Orias:** I hope he's not right because that's my livelihood there. I never thought of it that way. We're doing a lot of Indian gaming right now, and a lot of that money goes to building the infrastructure for the

native nations, and they're getting very, very fat right now on that. So I certainly would like to think the money gets a little bit more distributed in a fair way following the first-nation environment, where it goes to the people first and then the tribal counsel allocates it in a proper fashion.

Gamez: That ain't gonna happen in Vegas.

**Hickey:** I sat down in front of my first Navajo blackjack dealer the other day over on the Strip, so things aren't all great down on the rez.

**Van Gorp:** You know I've filed my claim. I think I'm one-sixteenth Wynn tribe. I've been trying to get my share. [Laughter] I don't think it's gonna happen.

**Gamez:** My hope is that it does exactly what I was describing earlier—gets nicely congested, we get a big, funny, Manhattanized-looking Strip that runs the length of the Valley. It's like Wilshire down in LA. You get slightly tighter, yet loose in a certain way—at least "fragmented" in the sort of Postmodern rhetoric. I don't think we'll ever have the sort of cohesive landscape that people who desire that recall—that kind of landscape never existed anyway. But we're certainly not going to have the cohesiveness of an East Coast kind of Boston common.

Van Gorp: So accept the mess, accept the theming?
Gamez: Yeah, accept it and let it sort of do its thing within reason. Let the Strip do what the hell it wants to do. Let it get bigger and louder when it needs to.

**Van Gorp:** Who gets to determine that reason? Who gets to set the rules?

**Hickey:** The golden rule: He who has the gold make the rules

**Gamez:** That's gonna happen and, frankly, you have to accept that, and we can only hope the wealth gets distributed a little more evenly.

**Hickey:** We should hope that America turns out, that we turn out as well as Boston, which is probably the most evil and ill-bred and scofflaw city in the history of the world. I was there for 48 hours, and I never saw anybody stop for a red light. You have a complete collapse of civil society out there—which is what happens when puritan hegemonies lose their authority;

they can't replace the repression with anything. That's the amazing thing I find about Vegas; in general, it's an amazingly law-abiding city. It's the only place I've ever lived where people drive the speed limit in a school zone—voluntarily. It really is. People stop here and people take care here because they know they won't be arrested. I think we do a good job of discouraging disorganized crime here in general. I find it to be a very, very pleasant, well-behaved place to live.

**Van Gorp:** So what advice do you have for our architectural brethren? What words of wisdom would you give to the architectural community?

**Orias:** Well, I'd really like to see more diversity in housing. That's something that we really need and people out there are hungry for.

**Gamez:** I think in the commercial world as well. I don't think every corner needs a strip mall, or that the same Home Depot, the same Starbucks and the same Walgreens. There are other franchises we could borrow—at least, if not sort of inventing some new momand-pops to fill those slots. I think there's a greater diversity both in the commercial and residential land-scape that we really need.

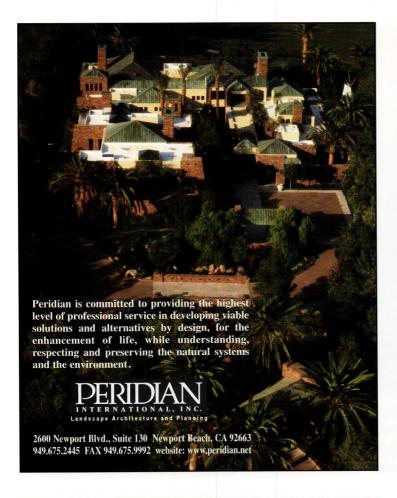
**Van Gorp:** How can the architectural community help the development community to expand and see beyond the standard boxes built now?

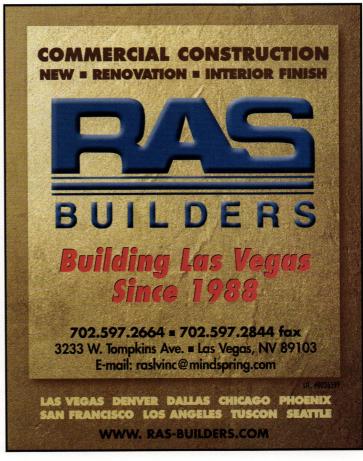
**Gamez:** We don't do a good job of prodding debates. We don't do a good job in the architectural community of putting ideas out there. We generally sell ourselves out. We're part and parcel of the problem right now.

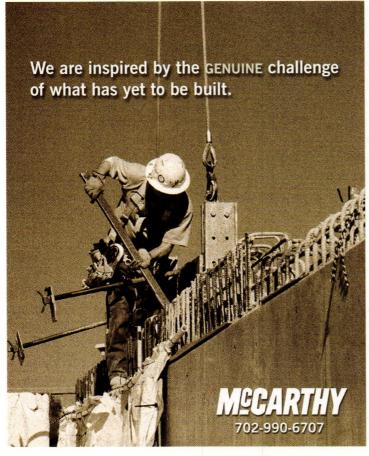
**Orias:** This is an excellent first step. It's great to have a magazine now that says *Architecture Las Vegas* on it, because that way we start to have an identity and a voice. And one of the nice things about this city is that it has a Strip. The Strip has a life of its own. It's a crazy, wild, wonderful, bizarre thing that has no rules, really. How many cities will let you have this plastic moveable monster that can do whatever it wants, and you expect to go and make fun of its own self?

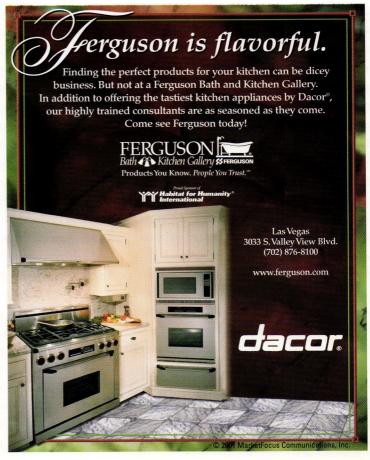
**Hickey:** Whatever its vices, it doesn't take itself seriously.

Kubat: I agree with that about the Strip. At the same









time, I think that architects in this Valley could do a better job in trying to help the development community figure out what's the right architectural expression really for this kind of environment. What works really the best in the desert?

**Gamez:** That's very much a double-sided coin, though. Arguably, we're not doing a

good job with that from the architectural perspective, but there isn't a wide audience for that kind of opportunity in the development sector. How are you going to build a variety of housing types if you've got a packaged Summerlin, a packaged Green Valley? And then the other thing is, there's a large market that, as you said, wants red tile and stucco. It looks like home, it feels slightly different from someplace else, it looks new and good. It's not necessarily offensive. But when you spread it around 10,000 units, it begins to look the same. If diversity is something we actually want to encourage, then both the architectural community and the development community need to think more broadly about the kinds of things we can live in.

**Hickey:** Right. There's actually a fairly wide pathway of stylistic options in arid land environments. There's something between Santa Fe and Rancho Mirage ... and those farmer cultures. And also there's major urban metropolises.

**Kubat:** I think there are some very good attempts locally at finding the right voice for local architecture—locally appropriate architecture from a residential point of view and from a commercial point of view. There's a lot of really bad stuff that's being done, too, and it's being done by local architects as well as out-of-town architects.

**Gamez:** That's the problem: The percentage of good architecture gets washed away by the overwhelming percentage of the things that are average at best.



**Kubat:** For example, when the county government center was done—and some people may hate it and some people may love it—when I came ...

**Hickey:** The name Saddam Hussein springs to mind. **Kubat:** But at the same time, for me, it was one of the first buildings that tried to express its place here in the unique place of Las Vegas, and it's not themed in the same sense that the Strip is themed. But it was looking for a use of materials and forms and other things that seemed to fit. I thought that it made a terrifically positive statement about trying something new.

**Hickey:** Well, I don't know. It really embodies what was considered to be polite aesthetic values here ... you know, the sticks in the ceiling, the whole kind of Santa Fe-Scottsdale thing. It seems like an embodiment of the sort of whole bourgeois, spiritual desert logic. So, having lived in those places, I find it a little terrifying.

**Kubat:** At least it was trying to find what is the voice for this environment. That's a challenge. What I'm saying is, it's certainly not the only expression and the only challenge out there for architects, but it's a challenge that certainly more work could be done on.

**Gamez:** I think they were wise to at least try it. Maybe they weren't 100 percent successful, or 50 percent successful. But the library system used to try. They don't anymore, right? And they got spanked on the hand a little bit for trying, and that is the city at large in many ways saying we don't want good architecture.

Hickey: I can give you a list of about four sort of

major American artists who have been treated so roughly by the Las Vegas government on commissions that they won't be back.

**Gamez:** I think we're not widely accepting right now, so there's something that has to change not only from the development community and the architectural community, but

from the consuming public at large. And I don't think it's a question of education. I do think we have a fairly sophisticated population. They know what they like and what they don't like.

**Hickey:** But we do have an entrenched anticultural newspaper environment. You have an entrenched anticultural environment down at the courthouse. You have a deep basic hostility to cosmopolitan culture in a lot of the major institutions—which doesn't bother me at all, because if I want to see a movie I can go to LA. But, in general, these are not particularly solvable problems. There's never been a moment of cultural enlightenment in the city government in my history.

Gamez: But I think as you get a greater density of people coming from other places, that have things that they like, you'll start to see those get imported as well. Maybe that's not the best way to do it. We import other cities onto the Strip, but maybe we have to think about where these other things we need come from and how they get reshaped to fit our landscape. I think quite often they don't get reshaped in the translation, they get plopped in. That's really probably the biggest problem. Because this is a place that's going to import everything. We're in the desert, we can't get a good head of lettuce, or we can't get a lot of things, because things are probably going to come from someplace else. That's probably OK. It's in the translation that we have to begin to work out the details a little more carefully.

Van Gorp: I think that's a perfect final note.

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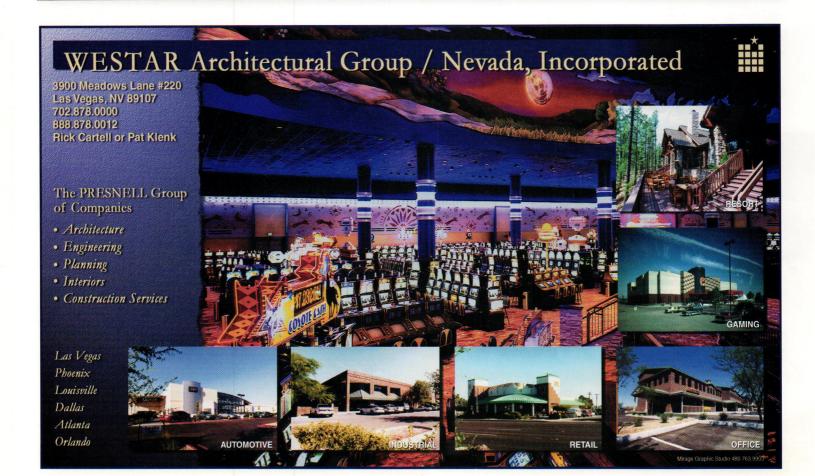
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#### Flaunt the City Electric BY AARON BETSKY

AT THE END OF WHAT IS PERHAPS HIS GREATEST NOVEL, An American Dream, in 1964, Norman Mailer gives us a vision of Las Vegas:

The night before I left Las Vegas I walked out in the desert to look at the moon. There was a jeweled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs 10 stories high. I was not good enough to climb up and pull them down. So I wandered farther out to the desert where the mad before me had come, and thought of walking into ambush.

Mailer gives us the great glittering Oz of gambling, isolated in its desert vastness, beckoning America with its vision of reality dissolving into the starry night. With enough technology, Mailer felt, we could fulfill our destiny, however tragic that fate might be.

A few years later, the architect Robert Venturi added formal analysis to this vision. Las Vegas was, he thought, the realm of "electronic expressionism." He noted that the dark labyrinths of casinos were designed to lose gamblers in time and space, and that buildings here disappeared behind billboards. He saw a new world in which physical form would dissolve in favor of nothing but signs and lights.

Today's reality is somewhat different—even if the city ever really answered to these great visions. The critic Dave Hickey sees Las Vegas as the place where America's puritan facade dissolves into a catholic taste for water, sin and redemption



through risk-taking. But even that rather seedier vision of a melting certainty shares with the earlier visions one great fault: It ignores Las Vegas to look only at the Strip.

Las Vegas is, after all, a city that this year will have 1.5 million inhabitants. The desert is far away now, beyond the outer reaches of sprawl. Like other cities in the Southwest, Las Vegas is a place where not only are buildings disappearing into diadems of electric lights, but where the very idea of a city is being flooded by the tide of red-tile roofs. The Strip is an island of slow-motion traffic around which most natives navigate, making only strategic forays into the resorts for haute cuisine or high fashion. What used to be downtown is now less about Fremont Street than a place where bureaucrats make judgments and people are jailed. Instead of community centers, such as schools, that organize neighborhoods, Las Vegas is

building concrete bunkers, each one nearly identical, dotted throughout the Valley. Even the few attempts to create some sense of place, such as the wonderful library building program of the late 1980s, have been discarded. Drive in any part of Las Vegas but the Strip, and you could be anywhere.

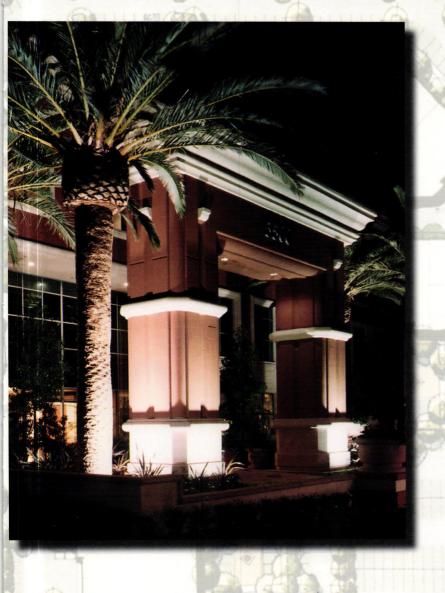
Of course, the Strip still gives identity to the city, but now that is exactly because it is the one thing that—as a whole—does not disappear. The march of tall buildings has created a human answer to the peaks surrounding the Valley. It is a geographical fact. This man-made mesa helps orient drivers through the sprawling mess with the same clarity that the Empire State Building or the Hollywood sign act as land-marks. It feeds Las Vegans as well as tourists with visions of other and better worlds that let us all escape from the messy reality we have made for ourselves.

And so now and then an architect will take those fantasies, harness them to the reality of the place and produce a building that promises to remind Las Vegas that it is real. Whether it is a Mark Mack-designed house in Summerlin, Tate and Snyder's airport addition or Eric Strain's design for the Mormon Fort Visitor Center, there are small moments where architecture becomes strong enough, evocative enough, and enough about how we can actually inhabit this inhospitable terrain, that it makes us wonder whether there can be a Las Vegas we can actually point to with pride of place.

If Las Vegas is ever going to be more than a patch of desert, a strip of casinos and a lot of sprawl, there will have to be. The debate is still open over what it might mean to be real in a city that adores escape and that is built in a place where reality is so harsh that this amount of people should probably not be living there. I still hope there might be some form of electronic expressionism that will let us see and understand all those systems, from electric wires to water and sewage lines to airconditioning chillers, that actually make this place inhabitable.

After all, the one theme you never see in Las Vegas is the one that does make it real: the fact that this is a city founded on the importation of a vast amount of technology, from Hoover Dam to the military bases, to the cars that made the Strip, to those glittering lights and gushing waterfalls. This is still an amazing apparition of a city, but it is fast dissolving into sprawl. We should savor this city's ability, alone among America's metropoles, to flaunt the machinery—the neon lights, air conditioning, electrical wiring, earthworks and water pipes—that make it all possible. I hope that some day somebody in Las Vegas will sing alive not just the body, but the city electric.

Aaron Betsky is the curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and a longtime observer of Las Vegas.





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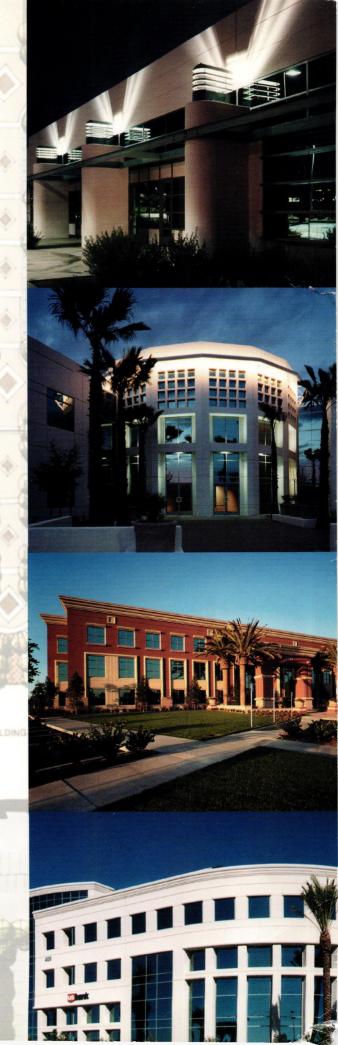
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